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EUGÉNIE SMET

MÈRE MARIE DE LA PROVIDENCE

Foundress of the "Helpers of the Holy Souls"

Adapted from the French by

CAROLINE C. MOREWOOD

WITH 44 ILLUSTRATIONS

The subject of this biography is a striking figure among the great women of the later nineteenth century. Her story has an interest almost unexampled: that of a profoundly supernatural ideal conceived among the merry games of childhood, pursued consistently through life, and left, when death called her at the early age of forty-five, completed and embodied in the noble edifice of a religious order which holds forth that ideal in all its freshness to the materialistic world of to-day.

SANDS & CO.

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Adapted from the French
By CAROLINE C. MOREWOOD

With an Introduction
By The Rev. JOSEPH KEATING, S.J.

LONDON: SANDS & CO.
15 KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN
And at Edinburgh
1927

Nil obstat

PATRICIUS MCGETTIGAN

Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur

✠ HENRICUS

Epûs Tipasit

Edimburgi

Die 25 *Aprilis*, 1927

Made and Printed in Great Britain at the KEMP HALL PRESS
in the City of Oxford.

THE HELPERS OF THE HOLY SOULS

'Twould almost seem some inter-world were theirs,
Remote from ours but near—so near—the land
Where at the threshold of God's Presence stand
The waiting souls attendant on their prayers——
A world aloof which yet the burden bears
Of Life and Death ; where Love puts forth a hand
On either side till e'en the gulf is spanned
By that strange tryst which Seen with Unseen shares.

So, forth they fare with Love's unfailing dole
Of tender service rendered to the least.
So, day by day, the treasure is increased
Of golden deeds whereof they weave the whole
Into a wedding garment for the soul
Which naked waits without the Bridegroom's feast.

E. M. Dinnis.

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INTRODUCTION

THE subject of this biography and her work are not wholly unknown to English readers, for as long ago as 1868 Lady Georgiana Fullerton published an account of the "Helpers of the Holy Souls," and in 1873 compiled a biography of Mère Marie de la Providence which ran through several editions, the last being dated 1904. The growth of her Congregation and the fact that proceedings are being taken with a view to introducing at Rome the cause of her Beatification are sufficient grounds for this new Life, which is skilfully adapted, rather than translated, from the standard French biography.

A common feature in the lives of all those called by God to found new religious orders in the church is the vast amount of opposition they encounter, not merely from the hostile or apathetic world, but also from dignitaries and officials of the church herself, the good of which they are labouring to promote. God chooses the weak things of this world to confound the strong, but their victory is not secured until their own personal incapacity has been made thoroughly manifest. The work is shown to be divine by the disproportion between the greatness of the end proposed and the inadequacy of the instruments employed. And we may say that the history of the beginnings of

each religious institution reproduces in little the origins of the church herself. Their founders must experience in their measure what our Divine Lord endured in establishing His Kingdom. "Unless the seed die, itself remaineth alone." In the following pages, which contain the biography of Mère Marie de la Providence, who in 1856 founded the "Congregation of the Helpers of the Holy Souls," this characteristic of trial and suffering is very prominent.

The child of good Catholic parents of Lille, she conceived a devotion to the Holy Souls almost from the dawn of reason, yet she grew nearly to middle age before she could give it practical embodiment in a new congregation. Her own not-too-robust health was one obstacle, and it gave her parents an excuse for long refusing consent to her leaving them. The various priests whom she consulted were generally prudent to the point of vagueness. No one would decide that she had a vocation which she ought to follow, and so year after year slipped by. Meanwhile, her zeal found vent in the establishment of an association formed of those who would definitely undertake a certain amount of prayer and sacrifice for the Souls in Purgatory, and in entering whole-heartedly into every parochial good work. But the thought that, whilst all the needs of the church militant were amply met by various congregations, there was none to take formal charge, so to speak, of the church suffering, never left her, and at last she asked God for a clear token of His will through the fulfilment of five conditions. The fifth of these was that she should be brought into contact

with some priest, hitherto unknown to her, who was inspired with the same idea as herself. A marked feature in her character was this confidence in the efficacy of the prayer of petition—a virtue also very notable in a saint of our own days, St. Thérèse of Lisieux—and all her life through she was wont to ask for similar signs of the divine guidance with complete assurance, so that a later director of hers, Père Olivaint, S.J., could playfully describe her as "the spoilt child of Providence, who is exacting, capricious, dictatorial with Almighty God; who asks for everything she wants and makes her own terms with the Divine Majesty." God, thus lovingly approached, gave her the tokens she demanded, and she presently heard, through a friend, of a priest in Paris, the Abbé Largentier, who had already formed a little society devoted to the succour of the suffering souls. However, it was not by his means that her congregation was finally established, but rather through the encouragement of St. Jean Baptiste Vianney, the famous Curé d'Ars, and the more immediate help of a holy parish priest in Paris, the Abbé Gabriel, and of various Jesuit directors she met there. Dire poverty, happily tempered by seemingly capricious but providential donations, marked the first establishment at Paris, and time and again the faith of the Foundress was tried by the lack of material resources and moral support; but, although there were surface agitations and anxieties, it stood every trial, and was rewarded by many unmistakable manifestations of the divine care. The story is here told with a reverent and affectionate sympathy, which

nevertheless does not conceal the human weaknesses of the holy Foundress, no more than those of some of the persons with whom she dealt.

The spirit of the Congregation is best expressed in its motto, which is "Pray, Suffer, and Labour for the Souls in Purgatory." Its interior life, as that of all religious, is sustained by intercourse with God in prayer, vocal and mental. Its daily occupation is the practice of a variety of spiritual and corporal works of mercy, especially amongst the poor. The Helpers devote, by what is known as "The Heroic Act of Charity," all the satisfactory merits of what they do and suffer as suffrages for the Souls in Purgatory. There is no Congregation in the church which is founded more absolutely on faith, for our knowledge of the state of purgatory as taught by the church, although clear and definite in substance, is by no means exhaustive. So the Helpers of the Holy Souls are dealing always in supernatural values; they are traders in the priceless but wholly imperceptible treasures of grace; they go on sowing diligently, although the harvest can be reaped only in another life. Father Faber characterizes devotion to the Holy Souls as the sublimest form of fraternal charity, surpassing all that we can do for the living, precisely because the former are utterly helpless in their sufferings, and dependent for alleviation on the goodwill of those on earth. But it was the happy inspiration of Mère de la Providence, by means of the Heroic Act, to make the practice of fraternal charity on behalf of the living avail also for the succour of the departed, and

her daughters have the happiness of knowing that the more they spend themselves in the service of their neighbour the greater is the help they give to the holy but helpless dead.

We may reverently wonder why it was left to the latest of the orders that the Holy Spirit has raised from the fruitful soil of the Church to engage of set purpose upon this wonderfully holy and charitable work. Zeal for the Holy Souls has always flourished amongst the faithful yet no one before Mademoiselle Smet thought of founding an institution for the redemption of these particular captives. She did not, of course, originate the devotion, but only under divine direction gave it more stability and permanence through her Congregation. That it met a real need is shown by the fact that during the seventy years of its existence, it has spread with remarkable rapidity, not only in France, but in Belgium, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, the United States, China, and, amongst ourselves, in England and Scotland.

Mère de la Providence embodied the spirit of her Congregation to the end. She succumbed to the dreadful disease of cancer after many months of intense suffering, in February, 1871, at the early age of forty-five. The Congregation was canonically approved by Pope Leo XIII in 1878, after her death, with rules, like those of many modern religious, adapted from the Constitutions of St. Ignatius. The habit worn is not of the conventional religious type, but consists of a neat black dress and bonnet, permitting the wearers easy access to the chosen field of their labours, the

homes of the poor. English-speaking readers will welcome in this biography the account given of the coming of the Congregation to this Island, and many perhaps will be able to judge for themselves, from acquaintance with the many-sided apostolic labours which have their centre at Holy Rood House in north-west London, how admirably the spirit of the Foundress and the ideal of her Institute continue to be demonstrated in our midst.

JOSEPH KEATING, S.J.

Chapter I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

ONE day during his captivity at Fontainebleau, Pius VII was taking his usual walk in the neighbourhood, when he chanced to meet a young student of the College attached to that town.

Something in his appearance evidently attracted the Holy Father's attention, for he stopped in his walk, and making the sign of the Cross on the boy's forehead, "God bless you, my child," he said, "and may you see your children's children."

This truly patriarchal blessing, which sounds so strange to modern ears, was answered in a very remarkable way. Henri Smet grew up, and in course of time he married Pauline de Montdhiver, a young girl of noble birth, and related to many aristocratic families in the north of France. Six children were born of the marriage, five daughters and one son. It was the second girl, Eugénie Marie Joseph, Foundress of the Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, who was destined to fulfil the Pope's pious wish, though in a far wider and nobler sense than had been ever anticipated by the Holy Father.

Eugénie was born at Lille on March 25, 1825, and was baptized the same day in the ancient Church of St. Étienne. Her early years were spent in the

happiest of homes, watched over by wisely loving parents, who fully realized the responsibilities of their state. Blest with good health, a large fortune, and an assured position in the world, Monsieur and Madame Smet nevertheless knew that human love and human happiness are but frail plants unless firmly rooted in the love of God and His Church.

In this truly Catholic atmosphere, the six children grew and flourished like young olive branches, worthy of the parent stem. Their faith was to them as natural as the air they breathed. It is not surprising, therefore, that Eugénie's attraction for religion manifested itself very early. She loved to decorate the nursery walls with pious pictures, and even arranged an altar, out of a small plank of wood adorned with muslin and flowers, before which she would kneel and lisp her childish prayers.

She was barely seven years old, when devotion to the Holy Souls in Purgatory seems to have taken possession of her. Yet there was nothing solemn or unnaturally precocious about the child. On the contrary, she was bubbling over with happiness and high spirits, full of fun, and always the leader in noisy games.

One summer day, some children headed by Eugénie were chasing butterflies. Suddenly their leader stopped, and with flushed cheeks and quick-drawn breath, burst out impetuously : "Do you know what I am thinking about ? Supposing someone we loved was shut up in prison, could we go on playing and catching butterflies outside that locked door, if we had the key to open it ? That is exactly how the souls in Purgatory

suffer when we forget them." The impression vanished as suddenly as it had come, and a few captive butterflies soon wiped out the memory of the captive souls.

It is indeed interesting to note these early indications of what may justly be termed the ruling passion of Eugénie's life. Her childish sufferings, even a nursery maid's too rough handling of tangled hair, were all offered up for the Holy Souls. Sometimes her zeal outran her discretion, as when she resolved to recite every day for their benefit, a small book of prayers, including the preface and the index at the end.

She was about nine years old when she began to attend the catechism classes at the parish church. So quickly did she imbibe religious instruction that she was soon set to teach her more backward companions. The Archbishop of Cambrai was coming in a few months to administer Confirmation, so there was no time to be lost. The parish priest was so impressed with the child's intelligence that he decided to let her make her First Communion before the usual age. She was barely ten years old, when on April 7, 1835, she had the great happiness of receiving Our Blessed Lord for the first time. When kneeling at the altar she offered herself entirely to Jesus, imploring Him to allow her one day the great privilege of consecrating herself to Him as a religious. The following day, a pilgrimage was made to the Church of Our Lady of Grace, and here she renewed her offering on the spot where, twenty years later, she was to return to consecrate her life to the relief of her beloved souls in Purgatory.

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Had the child any faint presentiment of what the future held for her?

The following year, on September 26, 1836, she was sent as a boarder to the Sacred Heart Convent. Leaving home for the first time was a sore trial to a child of her loving nature, but at that age tears are quickly dried, and Eugénie's buoyant spirits soon reasserted themselves. She was as full of fun as ever, and yet withal, an obedient and diligent pupil, and she soon endeared herself to teachers and school-fellows alike. Her views were always very clear and definite, and she announced at once that her parents intended her to stay for five years at the Sacred Heart Convent, then she was going to beg for another two years, after which she would become a nun. Thus did the child map out her life at the age of eleven, but God had very different plans for this ardent girl who loved Him as she loved her dear parents with a complete and childlike confidence in His mercy. This confidence remained her most marked characteristic throughout life, and Divine Providence delighted to encourage it by granting a quick and complete response to her prayers. She was indeed the "spoilt child" to whom her Heavenly Father could refuse nothing.

One little instance of this response to prayer happened soon after she went to school. It made a great impression on Eugénie and is so characteristic of her methods in after life that it is well worth recording. It was the custom for the youngest pupils to occupy the front benches in the chapel. Eugénie dearly loved being so close to the Tabernacle, and watching all the

movements of the priest at the altar. One day she was in danger of losing her coveted position, as an unexpected feast was announced, and those who had not the customary white frock were to sit at the back of the chapel. Alas! Eugénie's white frock had been left at home and it was too late now to send for it. What should she do to keep her favourite place in the front row? With complete confidence she turned to her beloved Providence: "You know quite well," she said, "that I expect You to give me everything—whether it be Heaven or merely a pin. Send my white dress and I will love You for ever!" Long years afterwards Mère Marie de la Providence remembered how her heart beat fast with excitement as she uttered these words for she knew that her prayer would be answered. Her excitement was still greater when she went up to bed the night before the Feast. Would she find her white dress there, ready for the morrow? She looked anxiously round the dormitory. . . . Yes, there it was! Her beloved Providence had not failed her.

To an ardent, generous nature like Eugénie's, gratitude is a driving force, and so every fresh grace urged her on to further efforts. "Freely ye have received, freely give," must often have echoed in her heart. Almighty God was indeed her Providence—could she not find some means of becoming His Providence?

One day light came, a stronger light than she realized at the time, indeed, *the* light that was to illuminate her whole life. Yes, of course she could be God's Providence, for she had it in her power to provide Him with something He wanted and could not get,

because His justice stood in the way of His mercy. After all, it was not such a difficult problem. She would give Him those souls whom He loved so much, and she would ask others to do the same by their prayers and sacrifices. She would say to them : " Will you not also become Almighty God's Providence ? He gives you everything, give Him something in return." These simple words are the key to her life, they sum up all her aims, and contain the germ of what was destined later to develop into a large and flourishing religious congregation.

The child had, moreover, many natural qualities that made her eminently fit for the accomplishment of her plan. With her keen intelligence and vivid personality, she was bound to take the lead in everything, whether in the classroom or the playground. Yet this easy ascendancy over others never engendered an arrogant, domineering spirit; she was too warm-hearted and generous ever to wish to shine at the expense of others; and her keen sense of humour was always tempered by an innate kindliness that shrank from inflicting pain. Indeed, everyone loved her. She threw herself at once, heart and soul, into her new project. All her natural powers of persuasion were brought to bear on her companions. She begged their charity for her beloved suffering souls, and immediately prayers, works, and sacrifices were thrown generously into the treasury of the Holy Souls ! The Feast of All Souls made a great impression on her; the tolling of the church bell, the Office for the Dead chanted solemnly in the chapel, stripped of its usual

flowers and lights, all stirred her to greater eloquence. However, Eugénie could never be solemn for very long at a time, and the young apostle was soon throwing all her energies into some merry childish romp.

These contrasts in the child's nature, the facility with which she went from one extreme to the other, were not lost on her observant mistresses. As time went on the spiritual side of her nature deepened, and the childish exuberance of spirits somewhat subsided, without, however, robbing her of her light-hearted gaiety.

The more advanced pupils at the Convent school were allowed to spend half the recreation hour before the Blessed Sacrament, a privilege of which Eugénie always availed herself. One day, a nun who had been watching her for some time, said: "You say a great many prayers, my child, tell me what you say?" The answer would savour of priggishness on any other lips. "Every day I say the Litany of the Holy Ghost that I may realize the vanity of worldly things, and the Veni Creator to know my vocation." Such prayers could hardly fail to be heard.

A retreat given in January, 1842, by Père Sellier, S.J., made a profound impression on her, and before it closed she had promised Our Lord to give Him all He asked. Her heart quailed before the terrible sacrifice of leaving home, but she saw quite clearly that it would have to be faced. How was she ever going to do it? A terrible struggle went on in the young girl's heart, obscuring for a time the light that had shone so clearly. Her keen zest in life, her loving disposition that shrank

from inflicting pain on others, countless difficulties magnified by her vivid imagination, all seemed to rise up and bar the way to perfection. Did not these very doubts prove that she had no real vocation? Was our Lord really asking this sacrifice of her? One day she spoke to one of the nuns, going straight to the point in her own characteristic way, without any preamble. "Is it possible to have a vocation without any attraction to religious life, or an attraction to it without any real vocation," "Yes, indeed, my child," answered the nun, "and a vocation without any attraction is often the safer of the two; the attraction can so easily pass away, but a vocation that is not influenced by the imagination is much more likely to last." This answer pacified Eugénie for a time, and she always looked upon this retreat as a mile-stone in her spiritual life.

Her schooldays were rapidly drawing to a close, and it behoved her to make the most of the remaining eighteen months. With her usual vigour, she threw herself into her work, whilst day by day her spiritual life was deepening, and the strong tie of affection that bound her to the nuns became ever closer. Her seven years at the Sacred Heart Convent made an indelible impression both on Eugénie and her mistresses. They never failed to help and strengthen her in those hours of weakness and suffering, that were bound to come to one who had offered herself so generously to relieve the suffering souls in Purgatory. Her heart ached when saying good-bye to these kind friends; but she would soon be back again, for was not God calling her to the Society of the Sacred Heart?

Eugénie's Home, Loos, near Lille

On September 4, 1843, Eugénie went to live in a country house belonging to her parents at Loos-lez-Lille. The joyous, impressionable girl of eighteen soon recovered her spirits, and was very happy in her home life, radiating peace and happiness on all around. Her little room at the top of the house looked out onto tall tree-tops and a wide expanse of sky. She loved to watch the ever-changing effects of cloud and sunshine and the wonders of the night, when "Eve lit her glimmering tapers round the day's dead sanctities." But in the village church near by dwelt the Creator of all these natural beauties, and from her earliest years, the Divine Prisoner had drawn her heart as a magnet.

Eugénie always had very clear, definite views as to what she wanted and how to accomplish it, and she drew up a Rule of Life which would prevent her from frittering away her time in useless amusements. Of course, prayer and the Holy Souls occupied an important place in her scheme, all her indulgences were offered for them, and she never failed to plead their cause in her letters to old school-friends. Neither must the poor be neglected. True, her pocket money did not amount to much, but she could make up for that deficiency somehow. Eugénie was never at a loss. Her father allowed her to distribute all the fruit that fell in the large orchard, and it was surprising how much fruit did fall—with a little assistance. Eugénie was not over scrupulous on this score, for charity covers a multitude of sins.

In spite of her happy home life, the thought of her religious vocation was always uppermost in her mind.

They were anxiously awaiting her at the Sacred Heart Convent, and she really wanted to go, in spite of having no taste for teaching. However, her parents refused their consent—"You are not strong enough," they said firmly.

Eugénie would not be discouraged, and repeated again and again her ejaculatory prayer: "Dear Lord, I know not how to give myself; take me." Once, our Lord seemed to whisper the words. "I will make of you a vessel of election, you shall be a religious, but unlike any other."

One day when beset with doubts and fears, she longed to consult Père Ringot, S.J., as her own confessor was away. But Père Ringot had to leave the following day, and she could not possibly go to him then. Fortunately, there is always kind Providence to fall back upon. Hastily she prayed that the good Father might miss his train. With complete confidence she went next day and rang the front door bell. When Père Ringot appeared. "You are fortunate," he said, "I ought to have left this morning, but missed my train." Eugénie was not in the least surprised. "Our Lord knew I needed your help," she said, "and He answered my prayer." She then told him her troubles, was she strong enough to bear the strain of religious life? The Father reassured her on this point and sent her away full of confidence, both in her vocation, and in God's never failing help.

Indeed, this warm-hearted, impetuous girl sorely needed guidance both for her interior life and her active works. She had decided to wait for two years

before entering religion, but these two years must be filled with good works. She used to write voluminous letters to her old school friends, letters sparkling with wit and shrewd common sense, letters of wise counsel where the girl of nineteen seemed to foreshadow the religious Superior. She poured out her heart to these friends, and confided her troubles to them. Her health, never very robust, must have been considerably tried by these alternating hopes and fears.

There were days of darkness and temptation when the struggle in her soul went on from morn to night. Now and then, God's voice sounded clearly above the tempest, and then again was drowned by the turmoil of her rebellious feelings and the flattering voices of the many admirers who clustered round this attractive young girl.

Moreover, her home life was not without its crosses. Madame Smet's health was failing, and Eugénie was often impatient and irritable. Sometimes she was beset with scruples, and the manner in which she handled this most subtle of difficulties evinced a courage and humility rare in one so young. At the foot of her crucifix, she cried : " O my God, I will fight against my temptations, and in spite of this darkness which Thou hast permitted to come over my soul, I will go to Holy Communion just the same, and afterwards I will explain everything in Confession."

Perhaps it was partly to distract her mind from brooding over these interior trials, that she threw herself so heartily into charitable works. In spite of occasional misgivings she knew in her heart that

nothing would satisfy her but a complete holocaust. In the meantime, however, whilst waiting for the convent doors to open, she devoted herself to relieving the sufferings of all around. She provided food and clothing for the poor, and, not content with distributing soup, she must needs make it herself. A few vegetables, a loaf of bread, and a little seasoning made a brew which the amateur cook imagined excellent. She was probably in too great a hurry to taste it herself, or to notice the amusement of her hungry protégés, as they sipped the tasteless beverage. Whether their affection for their young benefactress was strong enough to induce them to take a second helping, history does not relate.

Her attention was also drawn to the needs of the church. One day, when kneeling before the statue of Our Lady of Grace, she noticed how poor and shabby was the altar, and immediately made up her mind to have it redecorated. With the audacity of her nineteen years, she conceived the plan of composing a litany in honour of Our Lady of Grace; she would have it printed and sold, and when all expenses were paid, there must be 100 francs over for the altar. Suffice it to say, that when the scheme was carried out, there *were* 100 francs left over. The success of this venture encouraged her to further efforts. The roof of a neighbouring church was repaired, and the Lady-Chapel of St. Maurice at Lille was redecorated at a cost of 3,600 francs, which sum Eugénie handed over to the delighted parish priest.

This outward activity did not, however, stifle her soul, nor check her progress in the spiritual life. The

Monseigneur Chalandon, Bishop of Belley

thought of her vocation was always hovering in her mind, but as time went on, bringing her no nearer her goal, the old doubts and fears returned. Moreover, her spiritual advisers gave her but scant encouragement.

In 1850, Eugénie went to a retreat given by the Abbé Chalandon to the Children of Mary at the Sacred Heart Convent. After much hesitation she eventually decided to speak to him of her longings for religious life, and of the many obstacles which stood in the way. The prudent priest replied: "When one cannot see clearly, it is best to take a light and make sure. Weigh the matter well. You are not robust in health, you may be a very great joy to your family, and if you are faithful, God may use you as an instrument for doing a great work." The answer was not very encouraging, but Eugénie did not abandon her hope for the future. If she must remain in the world she will at least lead a life of perfection. The Abbé Chalandon gave her much excellent advice, and told her to write to him, if she found it any help. She did not fail to do so.

The following year, Père Lavigne, S.J., was preaching the Jubilee at Lille, and Eugénie consulted him as to her vocation. This time she met with more encouragement, "You have a true vocation," he said, "but wait, and I will tell you where to go." The father wanted to send her to the "Dames de la Retraite" but she was not drawn to this order. These conflicting opinions were very disturbing to a mind so impressionable and so humble, but peace was restored by a divine

message whispered to her soul, telling her not to follow this advice. Eugénie sent an offering of 700 francs, which she had collected in a few days for the Maduré Mission. The good father laughingly called her "the gold-mine of Lille" as she proceeded forthwith to start another collection for galley-slaves.

Our indefatigable beggar sometimes met with difficulties and misunderstandings, and it was always a Jesuit who helped her out. "Go straight ahead," said Père Gonthier, S.J., of Lille, "and remember that when you set about doing any good work, you must expect many contradictions; it is an old story that began with the Apostles, you are adding but a few short paragraphs to it." Père Gonthier spoke truly. At Loos, maybe, Eugénie added but a few short paragraphs to this old story of noble endeavour amidst many contradictions, but later on, what long and beautiful pages were written by Mère Marie de la Providence, and when the dying Mother laid down her pen, it was taken up by her daughters, who are ever adding fresh chapters for the greater glory of God and of His Church.

Complete trust in Divine Providence was always the distinguishing feature of Eugénie's piety, just as devotion to the Holy Souls stamped her apostolic work. These two great devotions were woven into the very texture of her life, and influenced her every thought, word, and deed.

Above the door of her room she hung a picture of our Blessed Lord amongst the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, with the text: "Take no thought for

the morrow, your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things." And whenever she passed through that door, she made an oblation of herself to her beloved Providence.

One day Eugénie was seized with the longing to have some outward token of her union with Divine Providence—a mystical marriage. Accordingly, on April 28, 1851, after Eugénie had made a fervent Communion, a small cousin of two, Elise Mourcou, placed a ring, which had been previously blessed, on her finger, lisping out the words : " Little Jesus, bless my cousin Eugénie." The happy fiancée of Divine Providence never doubted that on that memorable day she received great blessings, and we shall see that indeed her whole life was full of the most astounding favours showered on her, His "spoilt child."

The seed sown in the innocent heart of little Elise Mourcou blossomed out into a religious vocation, twenty-two years later, when she entered the Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls.

Relying always on God's Almighty Power, Eugénie continued her charitable works with ever-increasing ardour, and when asked to interest herself in the Association of the Holy Childhood, she responded so effectually, that, before long, hundreds of francs had been collected for the Chinese children. Her zeal was infectious, and soon the whole neighbourhood was roused to enthusiasm. "Eugénie and her little Chinese" became proverbial. She organized a grand lottery, by way of raising more funds, but here she ran up against the law and was threatened with a summons

for not having a licence. However, the zealous promoter was never daunted by difficulties; her resourcefulness and engaging personality carried her through everything, and she was able to hand over 3,375 francs to Mgr. Focade, the Vicar-Apostolic of Japan.

Strange to say, the very first mission undertaken by the Helpers of the Holy Souls, ten years after their foundation, was to China.

All this expenditure of energy on exterior works never seemed to weaken Eugénie's spiritual life, but rather to strengthen it. We often find that her periods of greatest outward activity coincided with a fresh step forward in the path of interior renunciation. So now in the midst of her exertions over the grand lottery, we see her kneeling at the altar of the Immaculate Conception, vowing herself to perpetual virginity. She had indeed made this vow some years before, and was in the habit of renewing it at all the principal Feasts of Our Lady, for she knew in her heart that God was preparing her for some great work. The time had not yet come, however, and the year 1853 passed like so many others, crowded with charitable works. Indefatigable as ever, Eugénie had only to ask to receive. All her friends, rich and poor, subscribed generously to anything and everything that for the time being was engrossing her attention. During the month of May she longed for the little statue of Our Lady in her room to be replaced by a larger and more beautiful one, and then the parish priest should come and bless it under the title of Our Lady of Providence, but Our Lady herself must be the donor. She found one to her

taste, and was just leaving the shop after inquiring the price, when she met a young friend ; Eugénie told her about the statue, and she immediately insisted on giving it to her, provided Eugénie would pray for her specially during May. So Notre-Dame de la Providence took possession of Eugénie's room, and looked down lovingly on the young girl who knelt at her feet and confided everything to her. Once, Our Lady seemed to whisper the words : " Some day, I shall be in a chapel." Eugénie was puzzled at the time, but Our Lady knew. The statue is now in the chapel of the Mother House at Paris. To the title of " Notre-Dame de la Providence " is added " Queen of Purgatory."

On the Feast of All Saints, 1853, Eugénie was wrapped in profound recollection. She heard Mass very fervently, flooded with consolations, and resolved to spend the day with great devotion. In the afternoon she went to Vespers with her family, and as the Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the altar, she felt impelled to put into practice a long-cherished idea of founding an association of prayers and sacrifices for the Holy Souls. The thought had come to her about the same day the preceding year, but she had been so engrossed with her grand lottery that it had never matured. Now she hesitated, perhaps the whole thing was an illusion, but then Providence is so kind, she will ask for a sign of divine approval.

" O my God, if it is indeed Thou Thyself Who hast inspired this devotion, grant that when I am leaving the church one of my friends may speak to me about Purgatory." Her heart was beating fast as she left

the church and slowly descended the five steps outside. She lingered a while, renewing her request with all her heart, and just as her foot was on the fourth step, Thérèse Petit accosted her: "Eugénie, whilst the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, I promised to join with you in offering up everything for the Souls in Purgatory, during November." Then, it was all true! Eugénie was transported with joy, but there was no time for explanations. "Come and see me to-morrow," she said, with a radiant smile.

But Eugénie could not wait till to-morrow to begin her new scheme. As soon as she reached home that same evening, she spoke to a girl who often worked at the house, and begged her to remember the Holy Souls. "The thought of my mother is constantly before me, ever since I lost her," replied the girl. Eugénie was much struck with this answer, and at once enrolled her as the first member of her new Association.

Later on in the evening, the whole family discussed the plan. Madame Smet fully approved of her daughter's zeal, and wanted everyone to join at once. "Wait a bit," said the eldest sister, "I must know first, to what I am binding myself; if Eugénie had her own way, we should belong to all the confraternities in the place."

Eugénie explained that all she wanted was to form an association of prayers and sacrifices for the Souls in Purgatory; there were to be no hard and fast rules as to obligations; all must do what they can, according to their strength and goodwill. The explanation satisfied her family, and all consented to be enrolled.

But Almighty God had much more to say to her. The following day, the Commemoration of All Souls, Eugénie was making her thanksgiving after Holy Communion, when the idea of the preceding day seemed to expand and become more definite. "There are communities for all the needs of the Church militant," she said to herself, "but I know of none entirely devoted to prayer for the Church suffering." Deep down in her inmost soul, the light grew more intense and inspired by the Divine Presence still living within her. "Am I not called to fill up this gap?" she whispered. The thought was scarcely formed when her soul recoiled from it, and her vivid imagination was overwhelmed by all the difficulties and sacrifices it entailed. Terrified and miserable she tried to convince herself that it was all a dream, that God was not really asking this of her, soon she will be calm and quiet again.

But, alas, the thought persisted, and left her no peace. Then, remembering her request of the preceding day, she multiplied her demands, and imposed five very definite conditions to prove that God had really inspired this thought.

The five conditions were as follows:

(1) The success of the Association of Prayer for the Souls in Purgatory begun the preceding day.
(2) The blessing of the Holy Father, in writing, on this Association, without waiting for the approval of the Archbishop of Cambrai.
(3) The approval of the Archbishop of Cambrai.
(4) Five people should join her in the foundation of this new Community.

(5) Finally, she must meet some priest, unknown to her before, who was inspired with the same idea of devoting himself to the Souls in Purgatory.

Eugénie Smet certainly appears somewhat exacting in her demands. How dare she impose such conditions on her Heavenly Father? But this "spoilt child" of Providence knew whom she was addressing, and He, who had never failed her yet, responded to her trust in Him, as we shall see later on.

Impelled by a power stronger than herself, Eugénie's life was being very definitely turned in one direction, and she knew in her heart that the Divine impulse must be obeyed.

November 2, 1853, was another milestone in her life. Indeed, it marked the parting of the ways.

Chapter II

CONDITIONS FULFILLED

FROM the church that day Mademoiselle Smet went straight to the parish priest and told him what had just happened. He listened to her story, but prudently thought it wiser not to give immediate approval to the Association of Prayer for the Souls in Purgatory, though a few days later he asked to be enrolled. As for the new religious institute he very definitely disapproved of the whole idea. It was obviously Eugénie's duty to remain where she was and carry on her good works. Did not the marked success of her undertakings prove beyond a doubt that she was making the best possible use of her talents and her fortune?

It would have taken more than this to damp Eugénie's ardour, and she went on quietly organizing her Association of Prayer. Her original idea was to limit the members to 33, but before long 180 people had been enrolled. The rules were easy: a Rosary once a month for the Holy Souls, five Paters and Aves in honour of Our Lord's Five Wounds, and Holy Communion once a year. The more fervent could offer a Communion and the Stations of the Cross once a month, and have a Mass said once a year. The new Association spread rapidly, neighbouring parishes

joined in the movement, and it was soon necessary to establish separate circles and appoint promoters. Offerings for Masses for the Dead poured in, and the poor received generous alms with the sole request: "Pray for the Holy Souls."

Ever since that memorable Retreat at the Sacred Heart Convent, Eugénie had kept in touch with Mgr. Chalandon, who had now become Bishop of Belley; she now told him of her two cherished plans. The Association of Prayer met with his entire approval, but he did not encourage her idea of founding a new religious congregation. He went on to say: "Your project for the Holy Souls is most praiseworthy. The Church allows her children to resort to these various practices. You have obtained prayers and alms for these poor souls, which is certainly a very beautiful and very good work. Your idea of founding an Order for the express purpose of delivering these souls from Purgatory, like the Order of Mercy for the deliverance of slaves, is certainly new and appeals to one's piety. The realization of the project would be an enormous undertaking unless God sheds floods of light over our dear Eugénie. The Curé of Loos is quite right in persuading you not to become the foundress of this new Congregation until you have exhausted all your good works."

It must have been very hard for Eugénie to realize that neither Mgr. Chalandon nor her old mistresses at the Sacred Heart Convent shared her views about the new Foundation. She seemed to be on the point of abandoning her project, but again her absolute

confidence in Divine Providence gave her supernatural strength: "This is a trial," she said to herself. "If God wills this new Foundation in His Church, it will succeed in spite of contradictions."

The only one who appears to have treated the matter at all seriously was her own Confessor. "My child," he said, "I will think it over before God. Nothing is impossible to Him. If He really wishes to make use of you, He will give you the means of accomplishing this work."

On January 25, 1854, the anniversary of her conversion twelve years previously, she made a complete offering of herself, with all the merits she could ever gain, in favour of the suffering souls.

We find the following in her own handwriting:

"I cannot celebrate this twelfth anniversary of my conversion better than by consecrating my life to the Holy Souls, and I made this Vow after my Holy Communion this morning.

"Holy Mary, my Queen and my Mother, I offer myself to thee to procure the release of the captive Souls in Purgatory. I place in thy hands, O most Merciful Mother, all my good works as far as they are propitiatory in God's sight.

"Dear Angel Guardian, I turn to thee and beg thee to bring often to my mind, that in order to fulfil my ardent desire to help these Holy Souls, I must ever be in a state of grace to merit for them. Remind me of this so that I may increase in fervour and in watchfulness over myself.

"Holy Suffering Souls, who can obtain so many graces for us, remember us in the midst of your sufferings. I will work unceasingly to obtain for you the joys of Heaven and I know you will plead for me.

"My dear Jesus, I will always carry this document with me as well as the picture of Thy Divine Heart upon which I have written, with my blood, these two Vows that bind me irrevocably to Thee. Oh, My Sweet Spouse, may every beat of my heart repeat these promises to Thee. Oh, My Divine Master, bless these my poor resolutions. I am Thine for ever and always, I belong entirely to Thee. Have mercy on me, Oh My Jesus, My Only Love. I sign these solemn Vows with my blood.

"Thy child, wholly abandoned to Thy Divine Providence, EUGÉNIE SMET."

This precious piece of paper, yellowed with age, is still treasured by her daughters, but when she wrote it she had never heard of the Heroic Act and it was a Jesuit father, Père Bertrand, who showed her several months later a copy of the Heroic Act as approved by the Sovereign Pontiffs. This Act is now made by all her daughters.

Meanwhile, the Association of Prayer had marvellously succeeded, and at the end of three months it numbered 1,500 members. Eugénie thought the time had now come to ask for the formal approval of the Archbishop of Cambrai. She was somewhat reluctant to take this step, for had she not required, as her second condition, the Holy Father's blessing before the

formal approbation of the Archbishop? However, on February 12, Mgr. Regnier refused to recognize the new Association officially. People might doubt whether the money collected for Masses really was used for that purpose, and rather than arouse possible suspicions he thought it better to abstain from this good work altogether. Not long after, Eugénie had another opportunity of approaching the Archbishop on the subject, but in spite of his fatherly kindness to the zealous young promoter, he still firmly refused his written approval.

But Eugénie could not help feeling that something ought to be done, and she begged her Confessor to consult the Dean of St. Maurice. The two priests talked the matter over, and came to the conclusion that the time had not yet come for any definite move; Eugénie must wait and pray earnestly for the light that is never refused to souls of good will.

Spring-time came bringing Our Lady's month, and Eugénie's room was converted into a veritable shrine where a constant stream of pilgrims came to venerate Our Lady of Providence.

Spring melted into summer, and the Feast of Corpus Christi was drawing near. Eugénie, filled with burning zeal to do honour to Our Lord, arranged to have elaborate decorations all along the route of the proposed procession. Paving-stones were taken up along the main thoroughfare in the village, and a number of fir trees planted at equal distances, festooned with flowers and flags. The whole village turned out to work. Eugénie was everywhere, giving directions and

superintending every detail, and infecting the workers with her own enthusiasm. But alas, when the appointed day came, the sky was black with thunder clouds, and for once Divine Providence was deaf to the "spoilt child's" prayers. Poor Eugénie had to bear up against a bitter disappointment and a sharp reprimand from the Prefect for having unpaved the high-road.

However, her disappointment was soon wiped out by a very extraordinary sign of Divine favour. Some months before, Eugénie had begged the Abbé Lelièvre, then in Rome, to push forward her Association of Prayer. Time passed and no news came. Those Bishops who had been asked to favour her petition had all turned a deaf ear, no doubt suspicious of a movement which the Archbishop of Cambrai had refused to sanction. There were times when Eugénie secretly rejoiced at the failure of this her second condition, seeing therein a sign that the idea of founding a new order was but the fiction of her own imagination, and that she need not, after all, forsake her home; at other times her devotion to the Holy Souls triumphed. She implored the Holy Spirit to enlighten the Pope, and was convinced that her project would succeed in spite of all obstacles. Indeed she was right.

Two days before leaving Rome the Abbé Lelièvre was received at the Vatican, and explained to the Holy Father the object of Eugénie's Association of Prayer. Pius IX listened attentively, and when he had grasped the full meaning of the work, he pondered over it for a moment, and then taking up a pen, he wrote at the bottom of the petition:

"Benedicat vos Deus benedictione perpetua.

"Romæ die 7 Julii, 1854.

PIUS IX."

It was at the beginning of August that Eugénie received the letter, telling her that her second condition had been exactly fulfilled. The blessing of the Holy Father had been given in writing, although the Archbishop of Cambrai had withheld his sanction. This definite sign of God's Will must have stirred Eugénie to the depths, bringing with it that profound humility which comes to all great souls chosen by God for some special work. She knew now beyond any doubt that God meant it to succeed. Three months later, Mgr. Regnier gave his formal approbation to the new Association, affiliating it with another Confraternity and thereby doubling the indulgences. Thus, the third condition was realized. The mists were gradually clearing away, and Eugénie was being led step by step along the path marked out for her by Divine Providence.

She redoubled her efforts for the souls in Purgatory, the many victims of the Crimean War specially called forth her sympathy, and many were the appeals made by her for Masses, Communions, rosaries, etc., for the dead soldiers and sailors. In November, Eugénie received a small book entitled *The Month of the Souls in Purgatory*, sent by a friend who knew about the proposed foundation. The book consisted of short readings for every day of the month, and on the 21st she was surprised and delighted to read the following words :

"O Holy Spirit, Thou hast raised up at different periods, all kinds of religious orders to supply the needs of the Church Militant. We implore Thee to raise up a new order in favour of the Church Suffering, which will be devoted specially to the relief and deliverance of the souls in Purgatory."

So she was not the only one who had thought of a new order ; others had been inflamed with the same desire. When would God vouchsafe to answer these fervent appeals? November had always been a very privileged time for Eugénie. During the Octave of All Saints' she had been allowed the favour of daily Communion, and afterwards to approach the altar five times a week.

"O dear Jesus," she exclaimed, "help me to understand my great happiness. O that my life may pass in preparation and thanksgiving ! O Lord, teach me to suffer. I know not how to be resigned to these sufferings, physical and mental. I beseech Thee only to grant me the grace never again to offend Thee." Our Lord answered this prayer by increasing her sufferings, but they only drew her closer to the Blessed Sacrament, her refuge and her strength.

As time went on the active opposition of her spiritual advisers gradually broke down before the indomitable courage and confidence of the future foundress. Mgr. Chalandon began to realize that the matter must be taken seriously and gave her some very practical advice as to the course she should pursue. First of all, her Confessor must approve of the plan, and also some

other priests well-known for their sound judgment. Armed with these recommendations she must win over Mgr. Regnier, Archbishop of Cambrai. It was impossible to do anything without his approval, but once his consent was gained all would be well. Mgr. Chalandon was still very sceptical, but was willing to admit that much good might result, even if Eugénie only realized half her hopes. Another friend of hers, Père Bertrand, S.J., gifted with deep spiritual insight, cheered her with these words: "You will be a religious some day; indeed you are one already."

The year (1854) that was drawing to a close had been marked by many a struggle for our future foundress, beseiged by every sort of temptation inevitable to one of her strong, impetuous nature. She who naturally delighted in prompt action had met with rebuffs on all sides. "Wait and see" must have been an intolerable motto. But the restraint had been a very necessary discipline, and had strengthened and deepened her spiritual life in a way that nothing else could have done. Her trust in God's Almighty Love never faltered. She would not try to force His Hand nor take one step forward without a clear indication of His Will.

Two of her conditions remained as yet unfulfilled. She had asked that five persons might join her for the foundation of her new order, and that she should meet a priest hitherto unknown to her inspired with a like devotion to the Holy Souls. We will see what actually happened.

When the year 1855 dawned, the whole Church

was ringing with Alleluias to the Mother of God, whose Immaculate Conception had just been pronounced. Eugénie began collecting funds for a chapel in honour of Mary Immaculate; this new quest brought her into contact with several women who seemed eminently suitable as "foundation stones" of her intended Society.

Three girls belonging to the best families in Lille promised their help, and the cook employed by one of them offered herself as lay-sister; moreover, Madame Viernot, a young widow, who had suddenly lost her husband, placed herself and her large fortune at Eugénie's disposal. The youthful Foundress had one misgiving, "We shall be too rich," she said. "God's works do not usually begin in this manner."

Madame Viernot worked energetically for the Association of Prayer for the Souls in Purgatory and to spread devotion to Our Lady of Providence, to whom she gave a magnificent crown of diamonds worth 10,000 francs.

Now that her fourth condition was fulfilled, Eugénie felt that it behoved her to take some definite steps towards the foundation. She accordingly consulted the Jesuit Fathers at Lille, who had always been true friends to her. The result was not very encouraging; the fathers foresaw great difficulties and recommended extreme prudence.

Poor Eugénie, it was always the same story! She who longed to press forward at full speed was for ever being restrained. However, one of the old fathers, gifted with prophetic insight, repeated to Eugénie on

two different occasions : " Mark my words, you will be the foundress of a Community." This prophecy was all the more remarkable, because the father hardly knew Eugénie and was completely ignorant of her plans.

During these trying months when the future was so uncertain, there were times when all the pent-up forces of her nature cried out for prompt and decisive action ; the constant restraint threw her back on herself overwhelming her with doubts and fears. She sometimes magnified her small everyday failings, and thereby hindered that liberty of spirit so necessary for her spiritual progress. Mgr. Chalandon tried to re-assure her. " Do stop worrying over your faults," he wrote. " Doubtless there is sometimes a little dust, a spot of mud, but when you have dressed your altar and arranged your lovely white flowers, do you imagine that all is lost because a speck of dust appears ? No, you just brush it away and think no more about it. So let Confession, or even an aspiration to God, be your duster, and then have done with it."

So far, as we have seen, the projected foundation had met with scant approval. Six months passed in this state of uncertainty, and when May came round, Our Blessed Lord Himself and His Mother deigned to give her that encouragement which her friends had so persistently withheld.

One night Eugénie had a very vivid dream; she called it a dream of heaven. She seemed to be standing quite close to Our Lord, and a voice whispered : " Tell Him about the work for Purgatory." " Dear Lord,"

she cried out immediately, "tell me what Thou thinkest of the work for Purgatory."

Our Lord looked at her very sweetly, but said nothing. Three times she repeated her request, and then His eyes glowed with indescribable tenderness as He uttered the words: "I will tell thee later on." Eugénie awoke, her whole being flooded with such intense happiness that sleep was impossible. The following night she dreamt she was in front of a tall statue, and the same voice whispered: "It is the Blessed Virgin." Eugénie spoke to her: "Dear Mother, last night I saw Our Lord and asked Him what He thought of the work for Purgatory, and He said to me, 'I will tell thee later on.' I do implore thee to make known to me what I must do." Our Blessed Lady looked at her and put her finger on her lips, without speaking a word.

Eugénie woke up again, her heart beating fast with emotion, and as on the preceding night she lay awake till dawn. Her Confessor assured her that this was something more than an ordinary dream, and indeed who could think otherwise? She had borne up bravely against the opposition and incredulity of even her best friends, and Our Lord came Himself to encourage her.

Although as yet no steps had been taken towards the proposed new institute, Eugénie was all the time working hard for the Association of Prayer. Mgr. Chalandon, Bishop of Belley, and Mgr. Regnier, Archbishop of Cambrai, both gave their powerful support. Mgr. Chalandon even promised to find

some suitable subjects in his diocese who would co-operate with Eugénie in this work for the suffering souls. Thus it happened that she first came in contact with Pauline d'Escrivieux whose zeal for the Holy Souls was just then intensified by the recent death of her beloved father, an old cavalry colonel. Pauline d'Escrivieux was not a complete stranger to Eugénie, they had met at Lille some years before and had been educated at the same Sacred Heart Convent. Another orphan girl, Mademoiselle de Ferrari, also joined the ranks, and thus Belley became a very active centre of the new apostolic work.

But still the future was dark and uncertain, and Eugénie was often in an agony of suspense. No more cruel suffering could have been inflicted on her than this protracted waiting without any certainty of her desires being realized. Mgr. Chalandon was for ever preaching utter abandonment to God's Holy Will, and complete submission to her Confessor. "Nothing else will bring you peace," wrote the Archbishop, "save only this complete abandonment to God and to His minister." He reminded her of St. Francis de Sales' description of the halcyon birds, destined always to be tossed about on the sea, but always able to look up at the sky from their nest. They are ever in danger of being submerged, but yet always escape. "You, too, are in the midst of the waves, but the heavens are above you; look up and fear nothing."

So Eugénie abandoned herself yet more completely, and was comforted by a deep inward conviction that her Divine Master meant her to continue her active

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life at Lille for a little while longer, and not until she had reached the age of thirty-three would she have to leave her home to become a nun. As a matter of fact, Mère Marie de la Providence pronounced her perpetual vows on January 25, 1858, when in her thirty-third year.

On the Feast of St. Ignatius, one of her favourite saints, Eugénie went to Lille to ask Mgr. de Garcignies, Bishop of Soissons, to give his formal approval to her Association of Prayer, at the same time making an offering of 100 francs for some charitable work in which he was interested. His Lordship thanked her and asked for another 400! Eugénie, counting on her beloved Providence, promised to bring the money that afternoon. During this second interview, after thanking her for her generous offering, the Bishop asked her if she had any wish to be married. "My Lord," she replied, "since you are kind enough to take so much interest in me, I will confide in you: I hope someday to be a religious." She then told him the graces she had received on November 2, 1853, and all that had happened since. "Day and night," she added, "I am haunted with the same thought; there are not enough prayers for the dead; 80,000 persons die every day. Where is the Community entirely devoted to the relief of these poor souls? The more I ponder on these things, the more convinced I feel that Our Lord is asking me to undertake this new foundation . . . but," she faltered, "I do not want to be led astray by my own imagination." The Bishop was completely won by the evident sincerity of Eugénie's words. "My child, come into

my diocese, I will be your father, your founder: you have reached a point whence you can no longer go back without incurring grave guilt." Overwhelmed with this sudden proposition, Eugénie promised to think it over, and so departed, armed with His Lordship's written approbation of her Association of Prayer.

Her heart was well-nigh overflowing with happiness as she went into the Jesuit Church near by. Benediction had just begun, and in the presence of the Adorable Sacrament, she begged her Divine Master to tell her if she was to accept the Bishop's offer and go to Soissons. She had indeed asked as a sign of His Will that she should meet a priest hitherto unknown to her, inspired with the same idea of a religious foundation. But the Bishop of Soissons was no stranger, therefore the condition had not been exactly fulfilled; she must wait for another offer.

In spite of her refusal, Mgr. de Garcignies continued to take the most fatherly interest in the future Foundress. Eugénie was always eager for advice from God's appointed ministers, and it had occurred to her that the Curé d'Ars might throw a ray of light on her future plans. Towards the end of July, a friend, who was travelling in that direction, undertook to deliver Eugénie's message to the saintly Curé. On August 2 her Confessor, the Abbé Clarisse, said to Eugénie, "I felt impelled to say Mass for your intention, imploring Our Lord to enlighten the Curé d'Ars as to the answer he should give you." A few days later she received a letter from her friend, dated August 2, saying, "You will be surprised, dear Eugénie, to hear from me so

soon; our plans have been changed, and instead of finishing our journey at Ars, we went there first." She then gave the Curé's message: "'Tell her she may establish an Order for the Souls in Purgatory when she wishes.' I have not been able to find out any more."

The Curé spoke very decidedly, without the slightest hesitation as if he knew all about it, although he had not asked a single question. Eugénie hastened to tell her Confessor. "What are you going to do about it?" he asked her. "Consult Mgr. Chalandon, he knows me and my plans, and as Bishop of Belley, he also knows the Curé d'Ars."

Mgr. Chalandon was not greatly impressed with the answer. "My child, I have told you before that the Curé d'Ars is a saint in whose prayers I have the greatest confidence, but as for his advice, I do not attach as much importance to it as you do, unless, of course, he really gave his attention for some length of time to your proposition. He has no time to answer questions, nor even to listen. I think he only reads about half of what is written to him, and only listens to about half of what is said. He is always too busy, and too much beset by crowds of people. Just now there are eighteen public conveyances going every day to Ars, full of people wishing to consult him. Consequently, half of them do not understand him, they simply guess, and make him say whatever they wish to hear. Many of them come away more puzzled than they went." The Archbishop concluded his letter by telling Eugénie she can, if she likes, write to the Abbé

Toccanier, Vicar of Ars, and ask him to consult his venerable Curé and let her know the result.

This was exactly what Eugénie had been longing to do, but, accustomed to leaving everything to Providence, she had decided to wait until Mgr. Chalandon himself proposed this means of finding out exactly what the good Curé thought. Eugénie accordingly wrote to the Abbé Toccanier and waited eagerly for an answer, fully convinced that light would come from Ars. But again she had to wait. The Abbé Toccanier was travelling, the letter followed him from place to place, and the answer was long in coming.

Meanwhile, fresh trials were awaiting the future Foundress. During the night of August 27, her temperature rose alarmingly high. She refused to quench her thirst, not wishing to miss her Communion the following day, as St. Augustine was one of her special friends. However, when morning came, she was in such agony with terrible shooting pains in her mouth that she could not leave her bed. Towards evening, the family doctor proposed to relieve the pain by lancing the inflamed palate. Eugénie was horrified at the idea, and refused to undergo the slight operation. At last, repressing her repugnance, she consented, and offered up the pain for the Holy Souls, and to obtain light on her vocation. Lancing brought on hæmorrhage, and after three days of intense suffering an abscess formed. A second lancing bravely endured for the same intention brought on a still more violent hæmorrhage, and her life was in danger. A specialist was summoned from Paris who never left her bedside for

twenty-four hours. The wound was sewn up again without any anæsthetic, the patient only stipulating that the needle should first be placed at Our Lady's feet.

"I suffered intensely," said Eugénie later on, "but felt strengthened by Divine Grace. When my Confessor came to see me, I made my confession and said, 'I shall not die, the work for Purgatory is not done." The danger passed away, but the weakness of her body reacted on her mind, obscuring for the time being that child-like confidence, which was one of her strongest characteristics. The future foundation appeared to her the phantasy of an overwrought imagination, impossible of fulfilment. Surely it would be better to abandon the idea once for all? She struggled manfully against these attacks of the evil one, and offered all her interior sufferings and her physical weakness for the souls in Purgatory.

The weary hours of convalescence were brightened by visits from her numerous friends, who had been so very anxious during her severe illness. When she was beginning to recover her strength again, the *Life of St. Gertrude* was given to her by two friends, destined later on to become her spiritual daughters. The book made a tremendous impression on her, for the great Benedictine Saint's childlike confidence in the Heart of Jesus, and her longing to rescue souls from the flames of Purgatory, so exactly coincided with Eugénie's views. There was indeed a marked resemblance between the two "sisters." We see the same naïve tenderness, the same cheerful self-abandonment, the

same charming familiarity and boldness of a "spoilt child," who knows she is loved. The friendship thus begun left its mark on Eugénie's after-life and we trace the influence of St. Gertrude in many a word and act of Mère Marie de la Providence.

Eugénie had hardly recovered from her severe illness when another blow fell, a blow that seemed to shatter all hope of a future Community. Madame Viernot came one day and said, "Your Community never will be established, I am going to leave you, and enter Carmel." Eugénie quietly answered: "If God wills the end, He will provide the means; He has no need either of you or of me to do His work. Go to Carmel, we will meet each other in Heaven." But the rich young widow had more to say. "You will not mind then if I ask you to give me back that crown of diamonds which I gave to Our Lady of Providence?" Eugénie looked at her friend with a piteous smile and went upstairs. She knelt for a moment at Our Lady's feet, sweetly apologizing for thus stripping her of her magnificent crown. "Truly," she thought to herself as she handed it back to the giver, "God's works are not founded on riches."

A few days later, Mademoiselle Blondeau came to say "Good-bye." She too had grown weary of the long delay, and had decided to give herself to Carmel. "I congratulate you on being a holy Foundress, and admire your courage," she said to Eugénie. "Let us ask Our Lord to make us faithful to our vocation," was the reply, and no trace of bitterness marred the parting.

Chapter III

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS FOUNDING THE NEW ORDER

THE desertion of Eugénie's two chief supporters was undoubtedly a great shock, but a direct blow like this, straight from God's Hands, called forth all her latent courage, and was comparatively easy to bear. Her friends comforted and reassured her and she went on calmly drawing up the plan of the future Society. She had thought out a very definite and concise summary which would exactly describe the aim and object of the Congregation. "The deliverance of the souls from Purgatory by the complete abandonment of all our expiatory works, whilst sanctifying the same works by the practice of religious vows." The whole ideal of the Congregation was absolutely clear and definite in her mind, as well as the practical means of realizing it. She was always on the watch for fresh ideas. One day, for instance, she heard the *De Profundis* chanted after a Requiem Mass, and said to herself that it should be chanted by the new Community every day after Mass. Again, another small detail of Community life was noted; her nuns should be awakened every morning by the ejaculation, "My Jesus, mercy."

Many a confidential talk with religious superiors had

convinced her of the great inconvenience that want of money can bring to a Community. She resolved not to undertake the future foundation without adequate funds. This part of the plan presented many difficulties, but there was always the inexhaustible treasury of Divine Providence to draw upon.

This beloved Providence fully justified her confidence by sending her a friend to take the place of the two deserters, a friend who was destined to be her right hand in the new foundation, and to take up the reins of government after Mère Marie de la Providence relinquished them.

Eugénie Lardin (afterwards Mère Marie du Sacré Cœur) was first introduced to Eugénie Smet by Pauline d'Escrivieux, who describes her friend in a letter dated October 22. Mademoiselle Lardin was then twenty-six years of age, and was living in Paris with her family. One day in confidence she had told her friend Pauline that she and her director had conceived the idea of founding a religious congregation for the relief of the souls in Purgatory. Pauline told her of Mademoiselle Smet, and promised to arrange that the two should correspond directly, if Mademoiselle Smet thought it advisable. The letter concluded by saying that although Mademoiselle Lardin had not the strong, quick temperament of Mademoiselle Smet, she loved God and was very capable, and had in fact many good points which would make her eminently useful to the new foundation.

Eugénie was almost overwhelmed as she grasped the full import of this letter. The fifth and last condition

was exactly fulfilled, she was about to meet a priest hitherto unknown to her, who had been inspired with a like devotion to the Holy Souls. The condition that had appeared utterly impossible had thus been realized, and at the same time, more than five persons had offered to join her new foundation. The barriers were all down and she felt herself carried away by an irresistible force. God had given in to her demands, and she in her turn must yield herself up completely to the Divine Will now so clearly manifested. By this time Eugénie had learnt prudence, and was determined not to be in too great a hurry. She wrote a somewhat vague letter to Mademoiselle Lardin, expatiating on her Association of Prayer, but saying very little about the proposed foundation.

On October 31 she spent the day in Lille, bent as usual on some errands of mercy. Afterwards she went to Confession, and told the Father of the non-committal answer she had sent to Mademoiselle Lardin, and that she was now awaiting developments. "Leave yourself entirely in God's Hands," said her Confessor, "and desire nothing but His Will."

As soon as she reached home that afternoon she was handed a letter, bearing the Paris post-mark, which had aroused the curiosity of the household. Eugénie ran upstairs to her room, and at the feet of Our Lady of Providence, witness of so many of her struggles and sufferings, she broke the seal, and read the letter through to the end.

It was from Eugénie Lardin, who, after expressing her happiness in thus coming in contact with a "new

sister," implored Eugénie to come to Paris for a few days and talk over the new foundation with the Abbé Largentier. A few pious women had already united to form a small Community, and Mademoiselle Lardin felt convinced that Mademoiselle Smet was admirably suited to take the lead. She concluded the letter by begging Eugénie to communicate directly with the Abbé Largentier.

Eugénie was dumbfounded at the calm way in which this utter stranger took it for granted that she could forsake her home and go to Paris at a moment's notice. What could she mean by saying, "For a soul like yours, sufferings are but a sign of fresh favours from Our Lord." "I do not know how to suffer at all," said Eugénie to herself, "either physically or mentally. I have not been put to the test."

A thousand conflicting thoughts rushed through her mind as she knelt there before her Blessed Mother. "I will not write to this priest," she cried, "I will not bind myself to anything. If he really has an inspiration, he will write to me first."

She was just putting the disquieting letter back into the envelope, when she found another half sheet of paper that had escaped her notice. Her hand trembled as she unfolded it, and found that "this priest" had indeed written to her first. The Abbé Largentier wrote in much the same strain as Mademoiselle Lardin, but with even more assurance. He took it for granted that Eugénie would agree to all his plans. They both wished for the same end, and though they might differ as to the best means of attaining it, he was sure they

would eventually see things from the same point of view—in other words, *his* point of view. He told her of his small Community; that the parish priest had taken the affair to Rome; and that progress would soon be made under the auspices of the Archbishop, who favoured the new enterprise. The zealous founder said that he had been praying every day for someone, humble-minded, yet sufficiently strong and decided to place at the head of the new Community. He then asked Eugénie three very definite questions: "Are you free?—Will you consent to join this community?—and under what conditions?"

If the first letter upset her, this second epistle overwhelmed her completely. She had been so set on this work, and now, when it seemed almost within reach, why should she thus shrink back, in mortal dread of the difficulties that seemed to bar the way?

The next day was "All Saints'," and when kneeling beside her beloved father at High Mass, her heart quailed at the thought of leaving her dear ones, and of casting herself adrift into the unknown, where she saw nought but suffering and opposition. But . . . if Almighty God wished it? . . . In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed, she considered how to answer the Abbé Largentier's questions. She dared not yet face the consequences of any immediate decision. Why not compromise? The Abbé Largentier must go on with his plans, and later she will enter his Community as a novice, but he must not count on her just yet.

With her Confessor's approval, Eugénie wrote to this effect.

She had given a similar answer to a priest in Lille when he had made the same kind of proposition. She was, however, always very emphatic on two points—the express object of the Community was to be the relief of the Souls in Purgatory, and a special act must be made in their favour in addition to the three vows of religion.

The Abbé Largentier's reply only increased her troubles. She was convinced that Providence had brought them together, and that from their co-operation would be born the Community which God was asking her to establish. They were both inspired with a true devotion to the Holy Souls, but beyond that they had nothing in common. They were built on completely different lines, and though they had the same object in view they would never agree as to the best means of attaining it. Small wonder Eugénie was perplexed! She was undoubtedly very impressionable and enthusiastic, but although she loved to pour out her inexhaustible energies on many different things at the same time, she was gifted with a keen intelligence that never lost sight of the main object. Her education at the Sacred Heart Convent and her intercourse with many priests and religious Superiors had given her very sound and definite ideas of religious life, and her twelve years of active works had fostered her practical common sense ; but, over and above all these qualities, was she not being guided by God's Almighty Hand, so gentle yet so strong ?

The Abbé Largentier, a holy priest, full of goodwill, wanted to carry matters immediately to a hasty conclusion. He mistook his own wishes for facts and

proposed to Eugénie suggestions and counter-suggestions until she wrote: "She could not follow him in such a Babel."

Eugénie was tormented. She had reached a very critical stage in her vocation and her life, and it was very suitably in the month of November that the crisis was passed. The first ray of hope came from Ars. The letter she had written in August had been pursuing the Abbé Toccanier throughout the country, and it only reached him at the end of October. His answer was written on November 11, from Ars, and was as follows:

"Your edifying letter reached me at Pont d'Ain, during a retreat preached by our good Bishop; it was evidently thus arranged by Divine Providence to give me the opportunity of speaking about you and your pious plans.

"On my return to Ars, on Holy Souls' Day, I laid your requests before my saintly Curé, according to your wish, and begged him to ponder over them in the presence of God, before giving any answer.

"I have repeated the same questions two or three times since, and he has always given the same answers. He thinks that the idea of such sublime devotion comes to you straight from God, and that you will do well to found an order in favour of the Souls in Purgatory.

"'Suppose this young lady has no funds?'

"'Let her wait.'

"'Should she establish this order in her own diocese?'

"'Yes, if she can do so."

" ' Suppose another Bishop offers his assistance ? '

" ' If she fails in her own diocese, let her try elsewhere.'

" ' Can she still remain in her own diocese, continuing her good works ? '—' Oh, yes.'

" Whether the Curé is speaking under Divine Inspiration or merely according to his own judgment, and because of his tender compassion for the Holy Souls, is a problem for those who live with him and know him intimately. That M. le Curé now and then has supernatural lights is for me an established fact, but I do not believe this always to be the case, although many exaggerated reports have been circulated. But you can be quite sure of two things : that he approves both of your religious vocation, and the foundation of this new order which, according to his opinion, will spread very rapidly in the Church. This is quite enough for you to take a decision, which you will carry out at the exact time and place appointed by Providence, whose faithful instrument you will be."

This letter made such a deep impression on Eugénie that the remembrance of it in after years always brought tears to her eyes. Mingled feelings of joy and sorrow swept over her—was she glad or was she sorry to have this further proof of the Divine Will? She felt that it was impossible to go back, but it seemed equally impossible to go forward. Fears again beset her. Had she fully explained her position to the Abbé Toccanier? Would it not be better to write to him again? The

separation would be so frightfully hard, should she not wait for some absolutely convincing proof of the Divine Will before taking any decided steps. So another letter was despatched to Ars, telling of the Archbishop's disapproval, of the Abbé Largentier's proposals, and her own repugnance, and of the opposition she must expect from her family. Then she asked advice: Must she join the Paris foundation, or must she remain at Loos a little while longer? It was not until November 27 that the answer came.

Meanwhile numerous letters passed between Paris and Loos, and Eugénie began to understand the nature of the work she had been asked to direct. The more she heard, the less she liked it. It appeared that Mademoiselle Joly, one of the Abbé Largentier's penitents, had opened a school for pupil-teachers, the proceeds of which were to support the new Community. Mademoiselle Lardin gave some lessons, but more teachers and pupils were urgently needed. The idea of teaching had never entered into Eugénie's schemes at all, and now she heard of nothing else. "I see nothing but classes, examinations, and diplomas at every stage. Does God indeed wish me to accept these means? I must confess I do not believe it." She was well-nigh worn out with the worry of it all. The inevitable parting with her beloved family so preyed on her mind that she seemed to feel her father's hand trembling in her own as he clasped it for the last time—she saw her mother's tears as she bade farewell to her beloved daughter. It was a heart-rending struggle. She who had never willingly inflicted pain on others was about

to strike a cruel blow at those she most loved. Her heart was torn between love for the living and love for the helpless dead.

One day, her Divine Master made her understand what it cost Him to be obliged to repulse a soul whom He loved with an infinite tenderness. She never forgot this vision, and kneeling before Our Lady of Providence she cried out: "My God, for Thee, and for the Souls in Purgatory." Her love for the dead had triumphed. In spite of many more agonizing trials her mind was made up. Henceforth there was to be no more hesitation.

On Wednesday, November 21, after Holy Communion, she offered herself to Our Lord through the Blessed Virgin for the suffering souls, and resolved not to let that day pass without speaking plainly to her mother. It happened that Madame Viernot, one of her "little deserters" (as she called her without a trace of bitterness) had that day entered Carmel unknown to her family, thinking that her widowed state entitled her to a certain liberty of action. One of Eugénie's sisters had been saying good-bye to her, and when she joined the family circle in the drawing-room after dinner she told them of the touching scene that had affected her so strongly. Eugénie had not as yet spoken of her future plans and now plied her sister with many questions—chiefly to gain time. Meanwhile, Madame Smet, apparently absorbed in her tapestry work, was listening to every word. The mother's senses must have been aware of suppressed excitement.

"There is no time to be lost if I want to speak today," Eugénie kept repeating to herself. There was silence in the room for some minutes, and then, all of a sudden, Madame Smet remarked to Eugénie: "I really cannot understand your friend's behaviour—leaving her relations without a word, and making the whole town talk! Indeed, I hope that if ever we have the sorrow of losing you, at any rate you will not make your escape as if you had committed some crime." Here was an opening indeed! But Eugénie's courage failed her, and she could only falter: "You need not worry, Mamma, I should not have the strength to do that." Her mother said nothing. Eugénie reproached herself inwardly for letting this opportunity pass. She seemed to hear Our Lord's words, "Peter, lovest thou Me?" She felt so utterly weak, so ungrateful to Him who had shown her such loving-kindness and tender mercy. But oh, how she loved her family, her works, her comforts, her daily life! How could she ever speak the words that would cut her off from all this?

Another long pause . . . and then Madame Smet went on again: "All the same, my dear Eugénie, I do not think you will die without having done some lasting work. Your Association of Prayer is extraordinary enough—to have enrolled thousands of members in two years—to have received the Holy Father's Blessing—to have distributed numerous leaflets—to have covered all expenses. . . ." "Yes, mother, but all that does not give a religious vocation." She had failed a second time! With profound humility she begged Our Lord to give her one more opportunity, to

inspire her mother with yet another remark to help out the confession that was trembling on her lips.

Silence again fell on the family circle. The sisters went on quietly with their embroidery, little guessing the struggle that was rending Eugénie's heart. Suddenly, Madame Smet put down her needle-work. She looked fixedly at her daughter as though she could read her thoughts : " My dear child," she said, " I am quite sure you will end by being a nun. Go and found your Order for the Souls in Purgatory. I think I shall have a shorter time there if this Community is founded by you." Eugénie could hardly believe her ears, and begged her mother to repeat what she had just said. " I believe," repeated the mother, with deep conviction, " that you are destined to found an Order for the Souls in Purgatory." " Are you speaking seriously, dear mother ? " she gasped out, " for you are revealing my innermost thoughts, my heart's desire." . . . Her quivering voice was drowned in a volley of words from her sisters : " Why, yes," they burst out, " Eugénie has been thinking of nothing else for the last two years. You will not let her do it ? " " Dear children, what right have we to oppose it if it be God's Will ? " Someone then tried to relieve the tension by making fun of the whole affair. " If Eugénie is going to take the veil, who can take all her possessions." They began at once dividing up her small belongings. Her brother joined in the joke. " I cannot well be Chaplain to your Community, but will you engage me as porter ? " However, the brave attempt to keep up appearances did not last long. The forced laughter

soon turned to tears and sobs. Eugénie was the first to recover. She heard her father coming upstairs, and, begging her sisters to control their feelings, she began talking to him at once about a book he was reading. Apparently, he noticed nothing as they all said "Good night," and dispersed rather earlier than usual.

In the solitude of her own room Eugénie thanked Our Lady of Providence who had, as it were, forced her to take this decisive step in spite of herself. She resolved to tell her mother everything the following day.

Madame Smet apparently had no notion that the affair had taken such deep root in her daughter's heart, and was rather annoyed with herself for the words that had slipped from her almost unconsciously the evening before.

"My child, you can have no notion what it means to found a Community. You must have subjects, you must have a considerable sum of money. You have neither the one nor the other, and your health is frail." "The works of God have never been dependent on money ; unless the Lord Himself builds the house, they labour in vain who build it. If Almighty God really wants this foundation, He will give me the means of accomplishing it ; if He does not want it, neither do I." She then begged her mother to allow her to make the attempt, provided Mgr. Chalandon and the Curé d'Ars approved of the scheme. After all it was not like a marriage, she could easily withdraw. "Your father will never give his consent."—"I count on you, Mamma."—"Give me time to think it over."

The dreaded step had at last been taken, and through all the tumult of emotions that swept over her, Eugénie was profoundly happy : "Oh, my God, what a coward I am ; I go forward, and then want to turn back. I will, and I will not." It was only too true, but God's unchanging Will was fixed on this scheme ; Eugénie was but the willing instrument in His All-Powerful Hands.

We have seen how every step forward in the holy Foundress's life was accompanied by some fresh trial and rebuff. The same day (November 22) on which she had spoken to her mother, a letter came from Mgr. Chalandon which damped her spirits considerably. The good Bishop gave her to understand very definitely that he would have nothing to do with her new Community. "If you only knew how often Bishops are worried by people trying to extract authorizations from them, you would leave them in peace." The Bishop concluded his letter by protesting that he would always have time for his dear spiritual daughter, but absolutely vetoed the founding of a new Community.

This discouraging letter was a great blow, coming, as it did, at this crisis in her life when she needed strength and encouragement. However, she made the best of it to her family, whilst admitting to herself that had it come by the first post that morning, she might not have had the courage to speak so firmly to her mother.

About this time, possibly the very same day, she had an interview with Mgr. de Garcignies who comforted and reassured her. When she had gone, another visitor

went in to see the Archbishop. "Mademoiselle Smet has just left," he remarked to the new-comer, "her work will succeed because it is God's work, but she will have many sore trials. I would dearly love to have her in my diocese." Strange to say, these words were spoken to Marie Prevost, who eventually became Mère Marie de Ste. Gertrude, an exemplary infirmarian for ten years, and a devoted nurse to Mère Marie de la Providence during her last terrible illness.

This comforting interview was soon followed by a letter from Ars which completely restored Eugénie's confidence and showed her plainly the course to pursue. The Abbé Toccanier wrote:

> "In accordance with your own wishes, I decided to wait until to-day, so that the answer might be well meditated in the presence of God. Here is the long desired reply: you must accept the proposal of this priest in Paris as a call from Divine Providence, you must co-operate with him in all you do. Everything proves that God has inspired you both with the same ideas about an undertaking which is as beneficial to the Church Militant as it is to the Church Suffering. The Curé could not express himself more plainly. In order to fathom his innermost thoughts, I mentioned your difficulty about leaving your parents who would suffer from the separation even more than you yourself. I spoke also of the void your absence would cause in a parish where you are the centre of all the good works. To my great surprise, the Curé did not

hesitate for an instant about you, although he usually advises young people not to oppose their parents, but to wait patiently for their consent. He said that the tears caused by natural affection would soon be dried. The Curé really encourages you, and when all the plans of this saintly priest have been approved of by the Holy Father, carry out your resolution, and then say to him : "Behold your handmaid, do with me what you will.' . . . Now let me speak quite openly to you. I very much like your words : 'My heart is like tinder-wood,' for it will be all the more easily kindled with the fire of Divine Charity.

"Do not be afraid of allowing yourself to be inflamed by the Heart of Jesus, furnace of Divine Love ; He will know how to remove all obstacles, and to appoint you the consoling Angel of the Souls in Purgatory, His beloved spouses. . . . "

"I must go to Paris, then," said Eugénie, without much enthusiasm, "but what will my father say ?"

One day she saw her father and mother shut themselves into the dining-room, contrary to their usual habits : "She is going to tell him everything," thought Eugénie. After a short interval the dinner-bell rang, and as she went into the room, trembling with suppressed excitement, her father held out his hand to her without speaking a word. She herself was far too upset to say anything, and the meal passed in silence.

The next few weeks were very trying. It gradually became known that Eugénie was planning a new

foundation and her friends hastened to express their entire disapproval. "My dear Eugénie, do be prudent," said Mère Cardon of the Sacred Heart Convent at Lille; "see how ridiculous you make yourself by posing thus as a Foundress." Eugénie bore no ill-will, and in December she went to Lille to make the retreat for old pupils which Père Fressencourt was preaching at the Convent.

The retreat had just begun when an aunt living in the town invited Eugénie to stay with her. This seemed a good opportunity for arranging an interview with the Abbé Largentier, who was pressing her to come to Paris. Mademoiselle Smet now told him that if he wished to see her he must come to Lille, and that the Dean of St. Maurice would be delighted to give him hospitality.

The first few days in retreat passed quietly, bringing strength and confidence to her soul. She was congratulating herself on finishing the eight days in peace when, on December 5, she was informed that a priest from Paris was awaiting her at the presbytery. "Pray for me," she whispered to Mère Cardon, as she hurried off. The Dean received her very kindly and insisted on taking part in the interview, as representing Eugénie's family. He begged the Abbé Largentier to be perfectly open and to give them a clear, accurate account of the community over which Eugénie was to preside. After much animated conversation it became very evident to Eugénie that although their objective was the same, their methods of reaching it differed considerably. She tried to find out what kind of

people the Abbé Largentier had gathered together, and what reliable assistance was likely to be forthcoming. She soon saw that he did not in the least understand her point of view, or did not choose to understand it. She was distinctly annoyed, but relying on her beloved Providence she said to herself: "Everything works out for good to those who love God. Who knows but that all this may prove the means of attaining my object?" They continued talking for some hours, and when at last Eugénie rose to go, she was well-nigh exhausted. In spite of a restless night and a dense fog, she rose early in the morning, and, after having told her Confessor, the Abbé Clarisse, about the momentous interview of the preceding day, she went to the Church of St. Maurice. The Abbé Largentier was waiting for her, and here at the altar of the Immaculate Conception, he said his Mass, and gave her Holy Communion. She had a special devotion to this altar. It was through her efforts that it had been redecorated, and it was there that she had made her vow of perpetual virginity.

They went on talking all that day. Mademoiselle Smet must come to Paris. "It is impossible," she declared, "my parents will never allow it." The more they talked the more uneasy she became, until the mention of Mademoiselle Lardin somewhat reassured her; the Abbé Clarisse had known her father. Eugénie could not, however, see the immense advantage of starting the foundation in Paris.

As the zealous priest rose to go: "I am so sorry," he said to Eugénie, "that you have not been able to

introduce me to your family. I will tell the Abbé Gabriel, the Curé of St. Merry, all you have said to me," and they parted. When the Dean of St. Maurice returned from seeing his guest off at the station : " Well, Father, what do you think of it all ? " asked Eugénie. "My child, I am not altogether satisfied—he is too calculating. However, there is so much that is providential in what has happened, that an attempt must be made. Go to Paris; if you succeed, well and good; if you fail, have no human respect, just come back here and take up your good works again. Courage! Our Lord will not forsake you." Eugénie thanked the kind priest for his hospitality and went back to the Sacred Heart Convent.

The excitement and anxieties of the last two days, the sleepless night, the fatigues of the early morning, and the stifling fog, had been too much for her, and when she met Mère Cardon at the Convent door, she broke down completely, " My poor child, what is the matter with you ? " said the nun. " Oh, Mother," she said in a voice choked with sobs, " I am worn out."

The kind mother took her arm and led her down the corridor where the Reverend Mother Superior was talking to Père Fressencourt. " I do beseech you, Father, to give your advice to this child, see how upset she is." The father listened attentively to her story: " I cannot disguise the fact that it seems to me a very serious matter. We will pray much for you during these two last days of retreat. I had noticed your place was empty." Eugénie knelt for his blessing, and returned to her aunt's house. There she went through

the whole story again. Her aunt congratulated her on her decision and courage, and after begging her to tell her parents everything, the old lady promised a thousand francs to the new Community. At the close of the retreat, when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, Eugénie renewed her baptismal vows with a fervour that impressed everyone in the crowded chapel. She was promised another thousand francs by the mother of two friends who at first thought of joining her, but eventually entered the Congregation of the Sacred Heart. Divine Providence had now provided the Foundress with funds, and also with subjects. Occasionally Eugénie used to meet her future daughters at her aunt's house in Lille and tell them of any fresh developments in her plans.

By this time the whole neighbourhood of Loos was discussing the future foundation, and Eugénie decided to tell her father all about her plans. One day she went with him to call on some neighbours and as they walked along, arm in arm, she said : "Papa, I have something to tell you, but I am not able to begin." She was trembling from head to foot. "My poor child, your mother has told me everything ; I was expecting it. . . . I only hope it will be put off as long as possible." She did not dare tell him that her departure was fixed for January 9.

The following day Eugénie went to see an aunt of hers in the town. Whilst they were discussing the future foundation her uncle came into the room, and when asked if he had heard the news, "Yes, indeed," he replied in frigid tones, "I have heard at the Club

and the Café that Mademoiselle Smet, who is at the head of all the good works in Lille, is going to found a community of contemplatives composed of cooks. What are you thinking of? All this nonsense must cease. I want to get you married." "But I have told you that I want to be a religious." "Yes, undoubtedly it will come to that. Nevertheless, you have no money and you will need enormous sums; therefore your plan is ridiculous, you must give it up." But nothing henceforth could shake Eugénie's resolution. She had, moreover, very definite promises of help from various friends and relations; she thought of asking her relatives for an annual allowance for three years, and at the end of that time, if the foundation proved a failure, she would give it up.

The Jesuit Fathers at Lille had always been good friends to the prospective Foundress, and now they cheered and encouraged her to carry on her great and difficult task. The sky was certainly clearing. Mgr. Chalandon, much to Eugénie's relief, had become once again the kind father of former days. "When I read in your letter that you imagined yourself no longer my child, I really feared that neuralgia had made you a little crazy. You will always be my child, and I bless God for the graces He gives you, as if He gave them to myself . . . . God grant that this year, 1856, may be the most beautiful and the holiest of all your years. Amen." A few days before her departure for Paris the Archbishop wrote to her saying he expected to be there also at the end of January.

Meanwhile, letters were constantly being exchanged

between the little Community in Paris, and their future Superior at Loos, showing how eagerly her arrival was awaited. Eugénie Lardin gave vent to her feelings in a letter dated December 9, in which she strove to express her intense joy that a mother had at last been given to them. Eugénie Smet evidently protested against this somewhat premature use of a title which might not suit her after all, and a few days later another letter signed by the whole Community, addressed her as "Dear Sister." This last letter caused her some uneasiness, the signatures were all written in the same handwriting. Was it possible that these future daughters had not even learnt to write ?

However, the die was cast, Eugénie was going to Paris. She had no money, she would not beg from her family, neither would she break into the funds which had been subscribed by her friends for the prospective foundation. As usual, Providence intervened. Madame Viernot was going to be clothed in the Carmelite habit on February 2, and very much wanted Eugénie to attend the ceremony. She enclosed 400 francs to defray expenses, knowing that Eugénie's charitable works left her but little surplus for expensive journeys. Accordingly, with her father's consent, Eugénie told the Abbé Largentier to expect her on Saturday, January 19. January 19, 1856, may be regarded as the birthday of the Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls. It was the day when Eugénie responded fully to the Divine Call, accepting all the consequences which her action

entailed: the day when she consented to be the Foundress of the new Institute.

To sustain her courage she had, together with the remembrance of the many graces and lights received, the sweet and dear message that had come to her from Ars a few days previously: "This work is the realization of a loving thought of the Heart of Jesus."

Chapter IV

THE RUE ST. MARTIN

THE day of parting came when Eugénie Smet must tear herself away from all her old associations and plunge blindly into the unknown. It was as if some irresistible power were forcing her to the edge of a precipice.

On Saturday, January 19, she went to Mass and Holy Communion at the parish church, imploring Our Lady of Grace to help her through the approaching ordeal, from which she shrank with every fibre of her sensitive nature. Although ostensibly she was only going for a fortnight, she felt it was but the prelude to a definite parting. Madame Smet had stipulated that Eugénie should not travel alone, it had therefore been arranged that a sister and a cousin should accompany her. The unusual treat of a visit to Paris filled these girls with delight. Little did they guess that to Eugénie it was the road to Calvary. To the many friends who gathered round to wish her God-speed, "I shall soon be back again," she said, but in her heart of hearts she knew it was "good-bye."

Some of her future daughters were at the station to see her off. It must have been a relief when at last the train started. The first definite step had been taken, there was no going back now. She realized,

that even if her scheme had eventually to be abandoned, she would never have forgiven herself had she refused to visit the little Community in Paris. As the train rushed onwards, she tried to picture the house in the rue St. Martin, and the people living there, about whom no very definite information had been forthcoming. She saw clearly that the Abbé Largentier had evaded her questions, we shall soon see why. If Eugénie had only known what was in store for her, she would have suffered still more.

It was at 22 rue St. Martin, a house occupied by a Mademoiselle Joly, who kept a small school, that Eugénie met her daughters for the first time. The arrival was graphically described by the Foundress herself. Mesdemoiselles Joly and Eliza Lardin were at the station, easily recognizable amongst the crowds that thronged the platform. Eugénie had never been to Paris before, and was distinctly disappointed with the narrow streets shut in by high buildings, the bustling crowds, and the squalid appearance of the rue St. Martin.

It was six o'clock on this winter's evening when they reached No. 22. Mademoiselle Joly led the way up three flights of stairs, and a door opened. Some one dressed in black came forward, exclaiming: "At last, we have a Mother!" It was Eugénie Lardin.

The poor "Mother's" heart sank as she stepped into the dark passage. She had not been prepared for such sordid conditions. Her ideas of Holy Poverty were represented by the clean and well-ordered austerity of a convent; but here, dinginess and muddle pervaded

everything. True, they had but recently moved into these quarters, but at least the beds might have been prepared for the three weary travellers. Mademoiselle Joly had, however, forbidden it—"Not being sure that the ladies would arrive."

When Mademoiselle Smet had despatched a letter home, telling of her safe arrival, she was taken through a room that served as dining- and class-room, into the common room. By the dim light of a very inferior lamp, she saw her future daughters busy with some needle-work. Eugénie went up to Mademoiselle Trigory, the head of the little band, and thanked her cordially for the letters she had written to Loos. "I did not write to you at all," said the ex-Trappistine, quickly.

It was not exactly an encouraging beginning, and Mademoiselle Smet passed into the dining-room. Thanks to Mademoiselle Lardin's relations, a few indispensable articles had been collected. But what a meal it was! Eugénie Smet, looking the picture of misery, hardly uttered a word. Mademoiselle Lardin tried in vain to relieve the gloom by lively conversation, which flickered up for a few moments and then died away in a depressing silence. The food on the table was not exactly calculated to stimulate the appetite. There was no butter at all, as the cook had thrown the entire supply into the saucepan with the boiling potatoes.

As soon as the meagre meal was finished, the Abbé Largentier was announced. He introduced the members of the Community, one by one, and tried in vain

to cheer the dejected Foundress by a few encouraging words. The future Mère du Sacré Cœur was watching her furtively out of the corners of her eyes, and described her afterwards as exactly like a caged bird, watching for an opening through which to escape. She would certainly have escaped at once had not a special grace prevented her. The Abbé departed, and they all dispersed for the night. Eugénie sat dejectedly in a corner, whilst Mademoiselle Molard made the beds. "What am I doing here—it is all an idle dream. No work can possibly succeed in such conditions," she said to herself. Then her thoughts flew back home, "How sad they must all be at Loos. Would it not be better to go back?" Aroused from her reverie by the shaking up of pillows and blankets, she said to Mademoiselle Molard: "What a lot of trouble I am giving you, Mademoiselle, I beg your pardon." "Never mind, you will more than repay us for it later on," she answered with a brusqueness which but partially veiled a warm heart.

The little iron bedstead boasted of three sound legs, but Eugénie could not sleep in spite of the cup of *tilleul* which Mademoiselle Molard insisted on her taking. The next day was Sunday, and Eugénie went to the 8 o'clock Mass at the Church of St. Merry, where she found Eugénie Lardin. The weather was atrocious, and Mademoiselle Smet contemplated escaping that same day. There was a train at 10.30, which would take her home in time for dinner at 5, but what would her sister and cousin say to this hurried exit? Her wandering thoughts were brought back by the

"Orate Fratres" pronounced very clearly by the priest at the altar.

As they left the church, Mademoiselle Lardin suggested a little walk in the rue de Rivoli till lunch time. Eugénie consented. She could not catch the 10.30 train, but there were others later in the day which would take her back. Lunch passed in a gloomy silence. These women in their Sunday attire looked strangely out of place, and did not fit into her idea of religious life. Even her sense of humour had failed her. In the afternoon, she was taken to the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, where Mademoiselle Joly discoursed on the various points of historic interest, but all her eloquence fell on deaf ears ; nothing could arouse Eugénie's enthusiasm. Vespers began, and the handful of people dotted about the huge Church brought before her mind a vivid picture of the crowded congretions at Loos. Her heart sank lower and lower, as the little party trailed back disconsolately to the rue St. Martin. The pious women congregated there had looked forward so eagerly to the arrival of this Superior, and now a sense of bitter disappointment cast a gloom over the whole Community. There was only one possible remedy : to send for the Abbé Largentier ; if he failed, then the case was indeed hopeless.

Soon after dinner, the Abbé was ushered into Mademoiselle Joly's sitting-room, which communicated with the suite of rooms occupied by the Community. Eugénie was still determined to depart—on the morrow. The priest tried to pacify her. "I really do not understand you, all this is only a

matter of time, you will soon get accustomed to it."

"I have been greatly deceived," she answered, "the people you have gathered here do not seem to me in the least fitted for religious life. Moreover, before beginning anything, I want to have the Archbishop's permission." The Abbé Largentier started from his chair: "One does not baptize a child before it is born," he cried, "you will spoil everything." "Very well, I am going to leave you, you must put one of these ladies here at the head of your work. After all, why did you ask me to come, if you have no confidence in me? I do not see things from the same standpoint, let me go home. I am enduring a martyrdom, I am not fit physically or morally to bear such a strain. I had better go back to my family."

The Abbé was astonished at the determination in her voice, and tried to conciliate her. But all his efforts were in vain, and they parted very coldly. The interview had taxed to the uttermost Eugénie's powers of self-control.

Mademoiselle Lardin was in despair. "This will never do," she said. "Mademoiselle Smet will never be able to settle down to such a life." Having tried all human means, she bethought her of seeking help elsewhere. As the Abbé Largentier had failed to cheer the discouraged Foundress, perhaps Our Lady would succeed? She accordingly proposed a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame des Victoires. By this time Eugénie's buoyant spirits had somewhat reasserted themselves; on the way to the Church she chatted freely about her many charitable works at home, but the new

Foundation was not even mentioned. She had apparently dismissed it from her mind.

Benediction was just beginning when they entered the sacred building, and as she raised her eyes to the altar, the Divine Comforter, her Refuge and her Strength, sent His silent message of peace into her soul. "Omni die dic Mariæ"—the words of the hymn came fluttering down from the choir above, hovered around her, and then found a resting-place in her troubled heart. Her Blessed Mother seemed to hold out her arms to the home-sick wanderer. What could she do but abandon herself to her Mother's all-powerful protection?

Eugénie decided there and then to begin a Novena. She would implore Our Lady either to let her die on the ninth day, or to give her the courage to overcome all the difficulties which strewed the path. Mademoiselle Lardin gladly joined her, and they resolved to visit the church every day of the Novena. But she was going home to-morrow! Dear Eugénie, so impressionable, so easily affected by external things, and yet so brave, so fundamentally supernatural! The winds that ruffle the surface of the ocean never disturb the calm of the deep waters below, and so trials and temptations may make havoc of her feelings, but in the depths of her soul her faith and submission to the Divine Will remain unmoved.

The following day, during Mass, the sacristan of St. Merry handed her a note from the Abbé Largentier. He agreed to the visit to the Archbishop, and to prepare the way he made an appointment with her for ten o'clock

the following morning at the presbytery, where the Abbé Gabriel would give her the necessary letter of introduction. Mademoiselle Smet returned to the rue St. Martin somewhat mollified by this concession. She had been warned that the Abbé Gabriel was a little abrupt in manner, or she might have been disconcerted at her reception. "What has brought you here with such an extraordinary idea? Make haste back to your own diocese."—"That is exactly what I want to do, and the Abbé Largentier knows it quite well." The bitterness underlying her simple words would have touched a harder heart than that of the good old Abbé Gabriel. "Well, well, my poor child, what do you want me to do," he said in the kindest and most fatherly tones. And then she explained her errand: "I do not feel I ought to act without the Archbishop's authorization; will you be so good as to give me an introduction to him?" "Certainly, wait a moment," remarked the Curé, and he wrote the required letter. "Go to the Archbishop's house at 10 o'clock to-morrow, with this," he said; "he does not usually receive visitors that day, but you can say you come from me."

Mademoiselle Smet thanked him most gratefully and took her departure. One little step had been taken, but at what a cost, and what a rock-strewn wilderness must still be traversed e'er her hopes could be realized.

The afternoon found her again at Notre-Dame des Victoires, faithful to her Novena prayers. Once again, she prayed for strength to triumph over her

The Abbé Gabriel

repugnance, or for death to release her from a hopeless undertaking; she added a petition for the success of her interview with Mgr. Sibour, Archbishop of Paris.

The following day, Tuesday, January 22, the approaching interview was still uppermost in her mind, and was the subject of many heart-felt prayers after Holy Communion. If only her Divine Master will allow the Archbishop to receive her with a smile, she will be able to plead her cause, but if he is cold and formal in his manner, the words will freeze on her lips. It seemed as though all depended on that smile.

In much trepidation, Mademoiselle Smet drove to the Archbishop's palace accompanied by her cousin. She was stopped at the entrance to the big gates by the concierge, who told her that His Grace was not receiving visitors that day. Eugénie showed her letter of introduction and passed across the outer court. She rang the bell and waited, but no one came; she rang again; the same silence brooded over everything. A third violent pull at the bell at last brought a servant to the door. "Have you been waiting a long time, Madame?" said the man, "I did not hear you. His Grace is not receiving visitors, he is saying his office." "Give him this," said Eugénie, handing in the Curé's letter. A few minutes later she was informed that Monseigneur would see her when he had finished his prayers. "O, Providence of God, directed by the Heart of Jesus, watch over me," she repeated again and again as she waited breathlessly in the big reception room.

If the Archbishop approved of her plan, then her

course was clear; if he disapproved, there was no alternative but to return home. She realized that on this momentous interview depended the establishment of the new Institute, or her return to Loos. The door opened. Monseigneur was ready to receive her. Whispering under her breath, "O, my God, do let him smile," she was ushered into His Grace's presence. She looked up and saw his eyes fixed on her with a kindly scrutiny and then . . . a smile of welcome lit up his austere features. Eugénie knelt to receive his blessing, and kiss his ring. "Mademoiselle, to what diocese do you belong?" "The diocese of Cambrai, Your Grace." "Why have you come to me?" he asked. "I have come with the intention of founding a Community for the relief and deliverance of the Souls in Purgatory; a Community where all the works will be offered for this one object." The Archbishop's genial manner put her completely at her ease, and she was soon telling him about her Association of Prayer, and how the thought of the new Institute had first come to her, and of all that Providence had done to bring her to Paris. His Grace listened attentively. "The Abbé Gabriel has told me all this, but, Mademoiselle, have you any funds?" "At the present moment, they are very low, Your Grace, but later on, things will be different." "Have you a house?" "No, Monseigneur." "What are you going to do?" Eugénie answered without the slightest hesitation: "Does it seem to you more extraordinary that Providence should find me a house, considering that all the houses in Paris belong to Him, than that I should have

met a priest to whom I was a perfect stranger, but who had the same desire to found a community for the Holy Souls as I had?"

The venerable Prelate was captivated on the spot.

"Go, my daughter, the faith which moves mountains can also build houses. You may proclaim it publicly to the city of Paris that you have the head and the heart of the Archbishop for your work, and if you need support and advice—I am here."

The Providence of God led by the Heart of Jesus had indeed watched over her. "You have the head and the heart of the Archbishop for your work," answered this same Providence. Never had a more decisive answer come to Eugénie Smet's prayers, and to commemorate this significant incident, the future Foundress took the name of "Marie de la Providence," and Eugénie Lardin, "Marie du Sacré Cœur," that they might be as it were living emblems of that confidence and love on which their Institute was founded.

Eugénie left the episcopal palace, her heart overflowing with a happiness too great for words. The dense cloud of depression which had enveloped her whole being for the past three days had suddenly dispersed—pierced by the sunshine of the Archbishop's smile.

She hastened to the Abbé Gabriel to thank him for having arranged this favourable interview, and lost no time in making the next move. Could the Abbé obtain from Mgr. Sibour his written approbation of the new Institute?

It is important to note how from the very beginning the Abbé Largentier had to step into the background. Almighty God had made use of him to fulfil the fifth condition exacted by His "spoilt child," but as soon as Eugénie arrived in Paris it was she who took all the initial steps, seconded by the Abbé Gabriel, and it was through these two alone that the Archbishop's written approval was obtained—the document that was virtually the charter of foundation, and which was as follows: "We approve of the establishment of this Institute in Our Diocese, reserving to Ourselves the right of approving, later on, of the Rules which will be submitted for Our approbation."

(Signed.) M. D. Auguste,
Archbishop of Paris."

Having been thus accepted as Foundress by the Archbishop of Paris, Eugénie could no longer dream of looking back. The Abbé Largentier understood and rejoiced at her complete change of attitude. Without any delay, he assembled the little Community in the class-room, and solemnly declared: "My dear children, henceforth Mademoiselle Trigory will take her place amongst you again, and you will all obey Mademoiselle Smet whom I make your Superior." The embarrassed Foundress responded with a simple dignity: "I will do my best to carry out the duties which Providence imposes on me." Mademoiselle Trigory then knelt down before her, saying humbly: "My Mother, I promise to obey you." It was a touching little ceremony, beautiful in its utter simplicity.

It was as yet too soon to think of rules and regulations for the Community while its very existence was at stake. First of all it was essential to find benefactors who would provide them with the bare necessaries of life. A friend of Eugénie's, living at Roubaix, told her of a certain rich Vicomtesse Jurien, whose large fortune was entirely devoted to good works. Eugénie wrote at once to a friend of hers, Madame Guilhem, to ask for an introduction to the Vicomtesse. The Guilhems whom she had known in Lille were now living in Paris, and Eugénie was disappointed when two days passed by without bringing an answer.

January 25 was always a marked day in her calendar, and this was the second anniversary of her total oblation of herself for the suffering souls. On her way to Notre-Dame des Victoires, she said to Our Lady: "Dear Mother, do make Madame Guilhem write to say that Madame Jurien consents to see me." The letter came that day, with the news that Madame Jurien was expecting her the next morning at about 10.30. Eugénie felt that the approaching interview was as important to the material welfare of the Community as that with the Archbishop had been to the spiritual well-being. Even the Archbishop's approval of the new foundation was of little avail without the means of procuring food and clothing for the sisters. In spite of all her courage and confidence, Eugénie passed another sleepless night.

The following day, Saturday, January 26, exactly a week since she had left home, she was standing on the

doorstep of Madame Jurien's house, at Abbaye-aux-Bois. "Madame has gone out," said the maid, who answered the bell. "I am astonished to hear that," said the visitor, "for Madame Jurien arranged this time herself." "Ah, so you are the person whom Madame spoke of when she told me to remind her of an appointment. How annoyed she will be! She has only just this moment gone out." "I will wait till she returns." "Ah, Madame, you will only waste time; one knows when Madame goes out, but one never knows when she will come in. She has just heard that an uncle is very ill in Burgundy. She will be going to him to-night." Eugénie turned away, terribly disappointed at this unexpected rebuff, and went out again into the street, where her cab was waiting. The driver asked where she wished to go. There was only one place for her when she was in trouble. "Take me to the Blessed Sacrament," she answered. The poor man puzzled over this unusual address, and then repeated his question. "I want to go to a church." "Where shall I find one?" "You must look for the nearest," said Eugénie, who had only been in Paris for a week. So they drove slowly down the rue de Sèvres, and drew up before the church of the Lazarists. It was quite empty, and, kneeling down before the Blessed Sacrament, she put her whole heart into a few simple words: "Oh, my God, what must I do?" she repeated again and again. Once more her soul was invaded with hordes of discouraging and anxious thoughts. There, alone with her Divine Lord, she poured out her troubles, imploring Him to enlighten

and guide her. Suddenly, she seemed to hear in her heart: "Go back to Madame Jurien." At first, she refused to listen to a suggestion so obviously unreasonable, but as it persisted, she gave the order to the bewildered cabman to return to Abbaye aux Bois, and soon found herself outside Madame Jurien's door, trembling violently. "So you have come back," exclaimed the maid, "that is very fortunate, Madame has just come in. I will go and tell her you are here."

In a few moments Eugénie was face to face with the Vicomtesse who was lavishing her attentions on a small and refractory baby, one of her orphan protégées. "Bonjour, Madame," she said without any ceremony, "come and sit down here on the sofa beside me, and tell me your story." Eugénie waited a moment for the maid to withdraw, but as she showed no signs of removing herself, the prospective Foundress made the best of it, and began at once the oft-repeated tale of her desire to found a Community for the relief of the souls in Purgatory. Meanwhile, the baby, ignoring the gravity of the occasion, gave vent to piercing cries. Madame Jurien tried to soothe it with snatches of songs, but it only screamed the louder. And so, to a running accompaniment of crying and singing, Eugénie continued her story. But, although the Vicomtesse and the baby gave but a divided attention, the maid at any rate, evinced the keenest interest—not a word was lost on her. "Whatever will come of all this?" Eugénie thought to herself. During a lull in the uproar she remarked, "I have been persuaded to appeal to you, Madame; I have prayed much to Providence, at

Our Lady of Victories." When Madame Jurien heard this, she related how, one day when kneeling before our Lady's statue, she had contemplated putting up a lamp with the inscription : "Thanks for unknown favours," but as yet no lamp had been placed there.

During this interlude the inquisitive maid and the screaming child had retired, and Eugénie could gain Madame Jurien's attention more completely. There was silence in the room for a moment, and then Madame Jurien said : "My child, you may count on me." "Dear Mother," exclaimed Eugénie eagerly, "what must I do?" "My child, did you not hear what I said? Our Lord inspires me to tell you that you may count on me." Madame's peremptory tones reduced Eugénie to a stupified silence. The Vicomtesse pondered a moment and then went on: "Yes, I may as well tell you that. . . . On New Year's day I was going down the rue de Sèvres, when all of a sudden the thought of the souls in Purgatory came into my mind, and I said to myself : 'To-day, everybody is receiving gifts, only the souls in Purgatory have nothing.' I was just at the door of the Lazarist church. I went in and asked for 200 Masses for the Holy Souls. I was kneeling at the feet of Our Lady in the chapel, lost in thought, when I heard, deep down in my heart : 'The souls in Purgatory—that is a good work, you will know about it soon.' I remember exclaiming to myself 'the souls in Purgatory is a good work,' why, it is not even good French. The incident then passed completely out of my mind ; but since you have been talking to me, my child, it has all come

back to me, and I have just had this message: 'Here is the good work of which I spoke to you on the 1st of January,' so do not be astonished at my telling you that Our Lord wishes you to count on me."

This mark of Madame Jurien's confidence touched a chord in Eugénie's responsive heart, and the Vicomtesse became at once her "dear Mother." She asked for Eugénie's address and promised an early visit. "But I was told that you are going away this evening," said Mademoiselle Smet. "Oh, that is not quite settled, and will depend on a telegram. Besides, my child, I want you to make the acquaintance of a holy religious. If I am not free, I will write you a note for him." Once again, Eugénie departed, almost overwhelmed with the astounding success of this interview. She saw so clearly the protecting hand of her Divine Mother in these strange events. What could she do but go straight to Notre-Dame des Victoires and pour out her gratitude?

The following day Madame Jurien called at the rue St. Martin. "You have no fire?" she exclaimed, as her eyes wandered in amazement round the shabby little room. "I only called to tell you that I am expecting you to-morrow, we are going to see Père Aussant."

Thus did that friendship begin which was destined to be a channel of God's grace to the new foundation. The kind and impetuous Vicomtesse was one of those original characters whose piety expressed itself in a manner somewhat bewildering to those who did not understand her intimacy with the supernatural.

She often mistook her own wishes for inspirations, and would make Providence responsible for thoughts that emanated from herself. These "inspired" messages were always delivered at once, no matter how unsuitable the time or place. It was, for instance, somewhat disconcerting to be told suddenly when crossing a crowded thoroughfare in Paris: "Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me." Eugénie did not quite know what to make of it. "Dear Mother, what do you mean?" "My child, you really need to meditate on those words. Remember them." Eugénie bowed her head submissively. Madame was quite right, her practice of the virtue of self-renunciation fell far short of her theory. Indeed, Madame was quite right in many cases. She was older than Eugénie, and better versed in the ways of the world, and had so obviously been sent by our Lord to guide and protect the young Foundress. Nevertheless, the friendship with this kind but somewhat eccentric patroness might have had disastrous results, had not Divine Providence sent Eugénie a spiritual director to counteract any undue influence.

This priest came into her life on the following day, Monday, January 28, when Madame Jurien took her to the Dominican Priory, and said to Père Aussant: "Here is the young lady who intends to found a Community for the relief and deliverance of the Souls in Purgatory." Once more, Eugénie told the story of her trials, her discouragements, and how the Curé d'Ars had sustained her throughout, and prevented her from turning back. The Dominican listened

attentively, scarcely uttering a word, but fixing his eyes on her with a penetrating look, as though he would read her soul. "My child," he said at last, "I will think the matter over before God. You must expect many trials, crosses, and tribulations." Madame Jurien differed completely, and did not hesitate to say so. "Father, I do not agree with you, the souls in Purgatory are the advocates of forlorn hopes. I think, on the contrary, that after a few difficulties, the Community will be firmly established."

As they left the Priory, Eugénie thanked Madame for her kindness and said "Good-bye." She would just have time to hurry back to the rue St. Martin, and change her dress before dining with her friends, the Guilhems. But the Vicomtesse had other plans. "My child, our Lord wishes you to accompany me to St. Anne's Orphanage." Eugénie expostulated: "Dear Mother, it is impossible, I am dining with the Guilhems. I must go. It is to the interest of my work." "My child, our Lord wishes you to come with me," she repeated firmly. "Everything else is a mere detail; we are going now." Of course, as Our Lord wished it, there was nothing more to be said. On the way, Madame told Eugénie that the Mother Superior of St. Anne's had not been faithful to grace—in other words, not submissive to Madame's orders—and to punish her Madame Jurien had kept away from the house for eight months. When they reached the Orphanage the Superior asked her distinguished visitor why she had not been for so long. "You know the reason quite well, search your conscience and you

will find out." After a little more conversation Madame proceeded to inspect the orphans, who were assembled for the occasion. She addressed a few words to them, and then turning to Eugénie, she said: "My child, you must speak to them about Purgatory." Eugénie was on tenterhooks. Even her beloved Holy Souls waiting for release from Purgatory seemed of less importance for the moment than the kind friends waiting for their dinner. However, any resistance on her part would only be met by an emphatic "Our Lord wishes it" from the Vicomtesse. She accordingly spoke a few words to the children, and made sure she could then escape and be just in time for her engagement.... "We will now sing the *Magnificat*" announced Madame with decision, and she stood motionless as if in an ecstasy whilst the orphans sang. Eugénie, meanwhile, was uttering frantic appeals to Providence to release her in time for her dinner party. But Madame's ecstasy continued: "He hath filled the hungry with good things" chanted the orphans, little knowing how apt the words were. All of a sudden Madame returned to earth again, and turning to Eugénie: "My child, Our Lord tells me to go away now," she said, without waiting for the end of the Canticle. After all, Eugénie arrived at the Guilhems' house only a quarter of an hour late. In spite of having kept them waiting she was warmly welcomed by the kind-hearted couple, who showed the keenest interest in her project. Just as she was leaving, Monsieur Guilhem said in the kindest manner: "Mademoiselle, I shall be happy to head the list of your subscribers," and forthwith promised her

3,000 francs, payable in six years. This was Our Lady's present to her, at the close of the Novena at Notre-Dame des Victoires. The next day she was promised another 2,000 francs by Madame Jurien.

About this time Mgr. Chalandon, Bishop of Belley, arrived in Paris, and Eugénie took the opportunity of seeing him. Much had happened since their first meeting six years ago at the Sacred Heart Convent at Lille. "So here you are, my poor child," cried Monseigneur with fatherly kindness as Eugénie knelt for his blessing. He listened attentively to her strange story. Since the Archbishop of Paris approved of her plan, he, too, approved. She could begin at once, but with great prudence. There was to be no external show, no habit, nothing to attract attention. She would thus avoid all the annoying consequences of a possible failure, although he was convinced the project would succeed.

Having proceeded thus far in her arrangements, Eugénie contemplated leaving Paris the day after Madame Viernot's clothing, about February 3. But Père Aussant and Madame Jurien strongly disapproved of her departure at this critical stage, when the new foundation needed all her attention. "You must no longer consider your family," said the Dominican, dealing a hard blow to the daughter's loving heart. How could she disobey her dear, kind parents? As usual she took her troubles to Our Lady of Victories, and begged that her parents might sanction a longer stay in Paris. Almost immediately there came a letter from her mother: "My poor child, I do not think

you can have had time to acquire all the necessary information about the foundation; it will be better, therefore, to prolong your stay." "Why do you worry instead of leaving yourself in God's Hands," said Madame Jurien when she heard this.

On Saturday, February 2, Madame Viernot received the Carmelite habit, and promised to pray behind her grille for the success of her friend's undertaking.

Mademoiselle Smet had indeed made good use of her fortnight's stay in Paris. The Archbishop had approved of her good work, the Vicomtesse Jurien had promised her patronage, the Abbé Gabriel his loyal support, and, above all, in Père Aussant she had found a spiritual director. She had also discussed the Rules and Constitutions for the new Institute with the Abbé Largentier. Here the path had bristled with difficulties, the co-founders differing completely on many essential points. The Abbé Largentier, under Mademoiselle Joly's influence no doubt, wished to ensure an income by teaching; Eugénie wanted purely charitable works.

It was obviously impossible to reconcile these conflicting opinions, even a temporary compromise was to Eugénie's loyal nature a betrayal of trust. For Our Lord had asked for a Community of religious, and not for a school of pious teachers.

On February 5, Eugénie went to the Tuileries with her sister Emma, to thank the Emperor's chaplain, Mgr. Menjaud, Bishop of Nancy and Toul, for having given his approbation to her Association of Prayer for the Holy Souls. His Grace received them very kindly,

and after the usual greetings he opened the conversation by saying: "So *you* are the lady who wrote to me. I thought to myself at the time: 'Whatever she has a mind to do, she will do thoroughly. Are you a widow, Madame?" "No, my Lord," answered Eugénie promptly, "I am happy to say I am not." The Bishop's kind smile put her completely at her ease, and she was soon telling him about her intention of founding a Community, and of all the approbations she had already received. Mgr. Menjaud listened with the keenest interest and promised 300 francs as a practical proof of his entire approval of her project.

Her fortnight's stay in Paris had already stretched to four weeks, and Eugénie prepared to go home. Mademoiselle Fanny R., who had just arrived from Lille, was given charge of the little Community during the Superior's absence.

On February 15, the day before Ash Wednesday, Eugénie Smet left Paris with no very definite plans as to her future movements. All her friends clamoured for her speedy return to continue the good work she had begun. She herself knew well enough that her place was the rue St. Martin, and not in her own happy, comfortable home at Loos. But, in spite of the many startling proofs she had had of God's Will, the supreme sacrifice still seemed well-nigh impossible. Sweet memories of childhood and youth bound her to her home with bonds so close that never could they be broken, she thought. "I do not know how to give myself, Thou must needs take me," was her constant prayer, and this Divine Lover took her at her word,

breaking the bonds that seemed indissoluble, for He saw, beneath the surface of her sensitive heart, the fixed determination to do His Will, no matter what it cost her. And that was all He wanted.

For the time being, however, she banished all gloomy thoughts and yielded herself up to the happiness of this sweet home-coming. Her parents fondly imagined that, confronted with so many difficulties, Eugénie would perforce abandon her project of founding a new Institute. But soon they realized that their beloved daughter was but paying them a visit, and that henceforth her home was in Paris.

It was, however, very necessary for her to have a little quiet time to think over the many bewildering experiences of the past crowded month, that she might gain strength, physically and spiritually, for the next strenuous efforts.

Meanwhile, her foundation continued to struggle for existence at the rue St. Martin, watched over by the indefatigable Abbé Largentier and the Vicomtesse. Many letters passed between Paris and Loos, bringing out in stronger relief than ever the wide divergences of opinion that existed between the two "Co-Founders."

"The Abbé Largentier is far too much taken up with temporal concerns, and does not attach nearly enough importance to the spiritual organization of the Community," wrote Eugénie. This worldly wisdom was so totally opposed to her own blind trust in Divine Providence, that it was no wonder the old doubts and fears returned with renewed force.

Père Aussant, who fully realized the difficulties of

the situation, saw clearly that a definite decision should be made at once, as to the exterior work of the new Institute, and whether or not, teaching was to be adopted. He even went so far as to say that if Mademoiselle Smet found it impossible to agree with the Abbé Largentier on this point, she had better separate from him as soon as possible.

For some time past this thought had been in her mind, though she had hardly dared to admit it, even to herself, but Père Aussant had now brought her face to face with the alarming possibility. The Abbé Largentier had undoubtedly been the instrument chosen by God to co-operate with her in this new foundation; how could she then cast him aside? In accordance with her usual custom, she apparently asked for some definite sign of the Divine Will in this most difficult problem. Madame Jurien wrote: "Obedience will be your safeguard, your beacon-light, your path. If you will but understand that once and for all, you will give up asking God for signs which He multiplies in vain, without being able to strengthen your Faith, because the soul feels too well that signs can sometimes deceive her, whereas obedience can never lead her astray. Here is my message for you to-day. "I will, what Thou wilt, whatever it be that Thou willest from me, and for me, O Jesus."

This protest against Eugénie's craving for signs was an echo of Père Aussant's direction. He considered that Mademoiselle Smet had imposed quite enough conditions on Divine Providence. "I forbid you in future to ask for even the smallest sign," he wrote,

"you have hitherto been a spoilt child, and therefore very wilful; now, you must be as one betrothed, who understands and already practises abnegation and devotion, so that she may become a true Spouse of the good Master."

This was no doubt very excellent advice for ordinary souls, but Eugénie Smet was being led by so unusual a path that to her it became an impossibility to follow the beaten track, and Père Aussant himself very shortly counselled her in quite a contrary direction, as we shall see.

The days passed only too quickly, and, in spite of urgent appeals from Paris, Eugénie kept putting off the inevitable parting. She could not see the way clearly before her, for the future looked as dark and forbidding as ever. Difficulties that appeared insurmountable blocked all further progress. Deep down in her heart was the conviction that Almighty God was asking for a Community of religious, it must be that or nothing. Any compromise on her part would only end in disaster, and yet she was faced with the Abbé Largentier's opposition and the equally grave difficulty of those five small rooms lent by Mademoiselle Joly, where silence and solitude were alike unattainable. How could she and her daughters ever become true religious in that atmosphere of noise and confusion? The constant coming and going of pupils and teachers made it impossible to practise that recollection so essential to religious formation. No doubt the strenuous month spent in Paris was partly accountable for the wave of desolation that swept over her

soul. At times it seemed as if her beloved Providence had abandoned her, and even acts of love awoke no response in her heart.

On March 7, Madame Jurien wrote: "My child, the state in which you are at present is good—very good indeed—I would not wish for anything different, because it might lead to a fall, whereas prostrate on the ground with your face in the dust, as you are now, you have nothing to fear. When we are raised up, we may well be afraid of sinking, but when we are down as low as low can be there is nothing to do but praise God for keeping us in that position, where no giddiness, nor any temptation against humility, can assail us. At this present moment you have nothing to do for your great work, why then should God give you any special grace? Come, dear child, let us both bless God for keeping you so low, so helpless, so incapable of producing even an act of love, for when His grace is conferred on you the effects will only be ascribed to the Author of all good. Were it otherwise, we should lose time and trouble, and our efforts would never be crowned with success, nor bring glory to God, our Master, our Love, our All."

"God asks you to come to Paris," wrote Père Aussant, "without knowing where to lay your head. You must forsake everything, even your poor, your good works, your relations. Henceforth, you must love and serve God alone."

Eugénie was kneeling at the feet of Our Lady of Providence, in the solitude of her own room, when she read those stirring words; scales fell from her eyes; she

saw everything in its true light, no longer distorted by her own fears and misgivings. The path lay clear before her; it was a steep and stony one, and every step forward would be stained with her heart's blood, but forward she would go, even to crucifixion. She must forsake what was beloved for the sake of the Belovèd. She saw clearly all it would cost her; she faced it calmly, deliberately, and prayed, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." So she passed through her Gethsemane, and prepared for the supreme Sacrifice. Henceforth, it must be "God alone"; nothing else mattered.

Chapter V

TRIALS AND DIFFICULTIES

EUGÉNIE SMET left Loos on her 31st birthday—no record remains, in her private notes, of the anguish of this parting. It was the Feast of the Annunciation, when under her Blessed Mother's protection, she set out definitely on her great task. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word"—completely summed up her attitude of mind. She was accompanied by her youngest sister, and an orphan from the Good Shepherd Convent, who was consumed with longing to serve the new Community as a lay sister.

On her arrival in Paris, Eugénie was met by a string of complaints. "It is a good thing you have returned, Mother," said Mademoiselle Fanny R., who was awaiting her at the station, "everything is in hopeless confusion at the rue St. Martin." The good sister did not explain that the "hopeless confusion" was chiefly due to her own exceedingly odd behaviour! "It is high time you returned, everything is going wrong," echoed the Abbé Gabriel, as he greeted her with his usual brusque kindliness.

Poor Eugénie's heart was still bleeding with the pain of parting from her beloved family, and although she had borne up bravely, the strain had affected her not

over-robust health. She accordingly went to consult Dr. Montargis, who had befriended her daughters during her absence. The kindly, courteous manner of the doctor soon won Eugénie's confidence, and she poured into his sympathetic ears the tale of the recent heart-rending parting and of the colossal task that confronted her. "Indeed, you have done a great thing," he answered, "but the cable has still to be cut adrift. This is a magnificent work that you have undertaken, you will have the grace to carry it through successfully, for God will support you." Then, descending from the heights of spirituality, to the level of practical common sense, he added: "The chief consideration now is, that your poor children have nothing to eat; go and have a piece of beef cooked and sit them down to it."

This was easier said than done, for money was scarce at the rue St. Martin. A few francs could be earned by threading beads, but the very small remuneration was scarcely worth the amount of labour expended.

However, it was St. Joseph's month, so it behoved him to do something to relieve the pressing needs of the small Community. A statue was accordingly bought and decorated, and the Saint invoked assiduously throughout the month. St. Joseph did not fail to hear their prayers. One day, Eugénie went to see her kind patroness at Abbaye aux Bois, and just as she was leaving, Madame Jurien knelt down before a statue of St. Joseph in the corner of the room, but after a few moments prayer, rising, she exclaimed abruptly:

"Ah ! I nearly forgot that St. Joseph wants me to give you 200 francs."

One essential element of religious life was very evident. Whatever they lacked in the way of rules and regulations, their poverty would have tempted St. Francis to envy. The dark, stuffy rooms and the meagre meals were trying enough, but at one time, water was so scarce that it had to be doled out in small quantities every day. Washing must have been an almost unattainable luxury. Mademoiselle Lobert was said to have been struck dumb with astonishment on her arrival, and it was a week before she recovered the use of speech. The inconveniences of poverty never daunted Eugénie, they were all part of the sacrifice which she had gladly made, but the want of space and the incongruous surroundings threatened the religious life of the struggling Community. For some time, Eugénie had contemplated a move. Mademoiselle Joly's school was rapidly increasing, and she foresaw that at no very distant date, she and her daughters would be politely requested to seek a shelter elsewhere.

Père Aussant preached patience, although he well saw the imperative necessity of a speedy change. Finally, he wrote to the young Superior. "Since you have so much confidence in Providence, pray that you may be led wherever God wills. Then walk down the rue de Sèvres, the rue de Vaugirard, and the rue Cherche-midi, but do not trouble to read any of the notices, as it will be in one of the side streets that you will find the house destined for you. Walk along

boldly, without any hesitation, and when you feel in your heart something whispering to you, 'Turn round' you must turn."

There is a marked discrepancy between this advice and that given a month before, when Eugénie was forbidden ever again to ask for a sign. But "the Spirit breatheth where He will," and while human criticism may see an inconsistency in the counsels of the holy director, the spiritually wise will recognize a divine inspiration, overruling the methods of pure reason. Eugénie fully understood this; she accordingly started out with complete confidence, strengthened by obedience, and accompanied by one of her daughters who knew Paris well. They reached the rue Cherche-midi without any inspirations, but just at the corner of the rue de la Barouillère, she felt impelled to turn, and walking briskly on for a short distance she suddenly came to a standstill in front of No. 16. Then, raising her eyes, she read the notice: "This house to be let or sold." Her heart was beating fast with excitement as a deep inward conviction took possession of her: "You will come here or nowhere."

The caretaker gladly admitted them, and, opening the shutters, proceeded to show them all over the premises, including the stables. After a thorough inspection, Eugénie was told that the place belonged to a M. d'Assonvillers, then in Normandy, that the right wing of the mansion was occupied by the Comtesse de Nugent, and that the rent was 4,000 francs a year. Never in after years could Mère de la

Providence speak of this day which was to be so fruitful for her work without deep emotion, for had she not found the Mother House quite near the Jesuit Fathers—so with an assured home came the providential facility to know and live the rule she was so soon to adopt for her Institute.

A few days later, a still greater treasure was bestowed on her, in the person of Eugénie Lardin, who was destined to be her help and support in every difficulty, and to take the reins of government when they dropped from the dying hands of Mère Marie de la Providence.

We have already seen how these two had been brought together, their first meeting in Paris, and their first fruitful Novena, and Mademoiselle Lardin felt that the time had now come for her to break definitely with the world and her family, and throw herself heart and soul into this new foundation, which so exactly fulfilled all her desires.

Her mother gave a reluctant consent; but as for her father, nothing would induce him to part with this beloved and gifted daughter, who was as the apple of his eye. Financial losses had embittered him, and when faced with this even greater sacrifice, he hardened his heart, and would not let her go.

"Father," she wrote, "if some nobleman had asked for your daughter's hand you would not have refused it. The King of Kings is asking you to give her to Him for the sake of His poor, and for those forsaken Souls of His in Purgatory. Do you think I shall cease to love you because I give myself to God?"

But Monsieur Lardin remained obdurate, and for

the first time in her life, Eugénie was obliged to disobey the father whom she loved with all her tender heart.

Since the day of her First Communion, she had resolved to give herself to God's service, and to recite a *De Profundis* every day for the most forsaken soul in Purgatory, and now she was spared the harrowing anxiety of uncertainty, for the call to this special life was too clear for there to be any hesitation. Her father was away from home, and her mother and sister just leaving for the south of France, when Eugénie Lardin decided to go.

After seeing the travellers off at the station, she returned home to make a few final arrangements, before leaving for her new home. Eugénie Smet knew well the agony of parting from beloved relations, so determined to wait and welcome the postulant who was going through fire and water to come to her. Hour after hour passed, and still she sat at her little work-table and waited. At last, when eleven o'clock had struck, she heard the front-door bell, and hurried to admit Eugénie Lardin, who flung herself on her knees before her Superior, exclaiming, in a trembling voice: "Here I am, your daughter; you are my mother now, and must answer for me." These simple words, straight from the heart of her first daughter, stirred in the soul of the Foundress that latent motherhood that lies embedded in every true woman's heart. As they clung together in a close embrace, Eugénie Smet was aware of a strange new experience, so exquisite that she was half afraid. Something quickened within her breast, and set her whole being aglow with the

pure flame of spiritual maternity that God gives to those who have forsworn all natural joys for His sake. Those who have experienced it alone can tell whether it be not part of that hundred-fold promised even in this life. It was a moment of complete happiness, when a mighty Power seemed to lift them above all earthly things and give to their new relationship a touch of the Infinite.

These two valiant women whom God had thus brought together were, to all outward appearances, a complete contrast to each other.

Eugénie Lardin was twenty-nine years old at this time, small and insignificant-looking, with dark hair, sallow complexion, and sharp features, redeemed from actual plainness by a pair of expressive, black eyes.

Eugénie Smet, on the other hand, was tall and well-proportioned, and carried herself with a graceful dignity that lent an air of distinction to the simplest garments. She was a "woman nobly planned to warn, to comfort, or command." Her fresh, open countenance and blue eyes had something suggestive of wide moorlands and clear, still pools, reflecting the sky above —something clean and wholesome and wind-swept. A childlike simplicity mingled with virile energy, gave her an irresistible power over others. Eugénie Lardin was perhaps a more intellectual woman, to whom life was a much more complicated affair. She loved probing to the heart of things, and finding out the why and wherefore.

Not only were they so different in outward appearance and inward gifts, but their early years had been

spent in totally different surroundings. Eugénie Smet had been ripened in sunshine, no devastating griefs had ever checked her growth or warped her joyous disposition. Eugénie Lardin, on the contrary, had been nurtured by suffering, and ripened through "storm and stress." Many a battle with her naturally self-assertive nature had led to a certain constraint in her manner. However, the one strong characteristic they both had in common was a devouring love of God, a whole-hearted love that abhorred half measures, and must give all or nothing.

The loyal support of this daughter was an inestimable boon to Mademoiselle Smet during the trials which came thick and fast that summer.

The Abbé Largentier was obsessed with the paramount importance of teaching and the futility of religious training. But, although a novitiate was quite unnecessary, a religious habit was to be assumed at once. Contrary to the old proverb, "It is not the cowl that makes the monk," he evidently thought that the habit would make the nun. Mademoiselle Joly shared his views completely, and soon began to show her displeasure at Eugénie's opposition by many little spiteful words and acts. The Community was somewhat in her power, as the five rooms occupied by the sisters were part of Mademoiselle Joly's suite. One day it was found that the door of communication between the two suites had been locked. There had been frequent little skirmishes before, but this virtually amounted to a declaration of war.

Eugénie and her daughters were defenceless, they

had no weapons such as the enemy wielded, and food rations were very low, so, putting up a barricade of prayer, they awaited developments, with the Angels on their side. In her heart of hearts, Eugénie "welcomed each rebuff." The sooner she could go from this house the better, but Monsieur d'Assonvillers was in no hurry to dispose of No. 16 rue de la Barouillère, and Eugénie refused even to entertain the thought of any other house than the one Providence had shown her.

Mademoiselle Joly's campaign had one great advantage: the sisters' quarters were no longer invaded by noisy pupils, and the tormenting sound of scales and exercises performed on a worn-out piano was now muffled by closed doors.

The days passed by in a monotonous round of hard work, whilst Eugénie was endeavouring to organize the daily life of the new Institute, her daughters threaded beads from morning to night. Strict religious silence was observed, broken only by pious reading. At certain stated times the Office of the Dead was recited and the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception. It was undoubtedly difficult to obtain unity of mind, whether for the practical side of life or for the spiritual, amongst a group of women all so totally different by nature and education, all with very strong and contrary views of what ought to be done, or left undone, all young and enthusiastic, with a beginner's dislike to moderation. Some of them, including Mademoiselle Lardin, were so keen on work, that even eating and drinking seemed a waste of time,

they preferred to take their meals standing. Others wished every duty performed with the precision of a cloistered nun. Mademoiselle Trigory, who was for ever mourning her Trappistine Convent, where punctuality was one of the cardinal virtues, would hurriedly extinguish the light at the first sound of the bell, whether or not her sisters had finished their toilet for the night. Some of the sisters cared only for works of charity, others only for teaching. Everything was in the melting pot. The day would come when all these different ingredients would simmer down into one solid mass, welded together by fraternal charity, and kept warm and malleable by the fire of Divine Love. But, in the meantime, the pot needed careful management to prevent it boiling over and spluttering.

The food question became acute, though the cook, Célanie Beauvois, had a simple method of increasing the supply when any unexpected visitors arrived. She merely added more water to the soup. Dr. Montargis once asked her if she ever mixed eggs with the boiled rice. "Oh, yes, of course I do," she answered. "And how many?" persisted the doctor. "I always put one egg for fourteen persons."

Mademoiselle Lobert (afterwards, Mère Marie de St. Augustin) had the difficult task of procuring food, and used to go out every day in an old bonnet and shawl, to the market, where she would pick up the scraps that others had discarded.

Eugénie's brave spirits sometimes flagged, and her thoughts would fly back to Loos, where so many poor

families whom she had tended in the past were infinitely better housed and fed than she and her daughters. At any rate, they had fresh air, and a plentiful supply of water, and were not distracted all day long by overworked pianos.

Now and then it occurred to her to return to Lille and make a more urgent appeal to her relations and friends for necessary funds. One day, at the parish Church of St. Merry, she was complaining to our Lord, and heard, as it were, a reproachful whisper in her heart: "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Why do you worry? If you are so calculating the work will soon fail." Immediately her soul was flooded with peace and confidence, and she hastened to thank our Blessed Lady and asked her for a gift of 100 francs, that same day.

On her return to the rue St. Martin, she was met by the cook: "Oh, Mother, there is nothing left in the purse, I took the last penny to go to the market." Eugénie's ears were still ringing with Our Lord's reproach, and she answered without a trace of anxiety: "We must trust in Providence." The words were scarcely out of her mouth, when the concierge handed her a letter. Glancing at the handwriting and postmark, which were both unknown to her, she proceeded to open the envelope, and drew out a blank sheet of paper . . . and a note for 100 francs. Eugénie fell on her knees in an instant, without waiting to take off her shawl: "My God, I promise I will never doubt Thee again." After this there could be no question of going home to beg. Providence was responsible for the

food-supply of the family. Indeed, she needed all her trust and confidence to carry her through the ever-increasing trials that followed. The conditions under which they lived would have tried the strongest constitutions. The small, dark, badly ventilated rooms, the scarcity of food, the ceaseless round of work, and the unrestful atmosphere of this place, which was neither a convent nor a home, the constant clash of uncongenial temperaments—formed a crescendo of trials which, taken singly, would have been hard enough to bear, but when accumulated, became very severe tests of courage and endurance. In spite of heroic efforts one after another gave way under the strain. Célanie Beauvois was the first to break down. Towards the end of April, she was busy ironing in the so-called kitchen when, after shutting the window, she collapsed on the floor in a dead faint. Eugénie returned from Mass soon after, and found one of the sisters deluging her with cold water, but it was not until Dr. Montargis had been called that she recovered consciousness. He saw at a glance that they were nearly all on the verge of a breakdown. He inspected each one in turn, and remarked to the Superior: "These rooms are dreadful, no air, nor light. If typhoid breaks out, the patient will have to go to hospital." Eugénie's motherly heart was touched to the quick. She said nothing, but inwardly resolved that none of her daughters should be taken to hospital, unless she were obliged to go there herself. The kind-hearted Doctor was so touched with the Sisters' condition, and with the pluck that held their lips from

complaining, that he immediately told the story to a Madame Gargan, the manageress of a large shop, who arrived soon after laden with wine and other delicacies for the invalids. For the rest of her life, Madame Gargan remained a kind and considerate friend to the Helpers of the Holy Souls.

These trials of poverty and sickness could, however, all be turned to spiritual profit, and would help rather than hinder the development of a true religious spirit. But the constant friction between the two co-founders destroyed that unity and fraternal charity without which no religious life can exist.

The Abbé Largentier was an excellent priest and possessed many good qualities, but he had none of the qualifications of a founder. Eugénie had realized this, almost from the beginning, but still she had done her utmost to conform to the one whom God had apparently chosen for the same great work. But in spite of valiant efforts her confidence in his judgment was completely destroyed, and when he showed his annoyance with her for deserting his confessional, she felt that they had indeed come to a parting of the ways. She could not, however, take any decisive step during the Abbé Gabriel's absence. As soon as he returned, on the eve of the Ascension, Eugénie went to see him at the presbytery and announced simply and straightforwardly, that, on account of the constant misunderstandings between herself and the Abbé Largentier, she saw no alternative but to return home and leave him free to found a community according to his personal tastes. When the Abbé Gabriel alluded to

the chief grievance, Eugénie very gently, but firmly, claimed complete liberty in the delicate matter of confession. The good parish priest was bound to admit the justice of this claim, but he refused to pronounce a decisive judgment on the main issue, although he must have felt that a separation was inevitable.

Eugénie's frank, loyal nature rebelled against deceitful methods, and when she found that the Abbé Largentier not only encouraged all manner of tale-telling, but actually disparaged her to her own daughters, she felt impelled to protest against this undermining of her authority as religious Superior.

So with the Abbé Gabriel's approval, she wrote a very firm and dignified protest against his behaviour, carefully avoiding any accusation for which she could not produce ample evidence. The Abbé Largentier retaliated by a string of petty complaints, and a feeble attempt at self-justification, utterly ignoring the plain accusations made against him. This state of affairs could not be tolerated. No religious life could develop in this atmosphere of strife and discord. "Was it really worth while continuing the struggle?" thought the Abbé Gabriel, for he knew that he must soon decide the fate of the new Foundation. Common sense reviewed the position, and saw a handful of ill-assorted young women spending their time threading beads while their Superior was for ever at loggerheads with her co-founder. But the Abbé Gabriel knew that God's designs cannot be measured by the narrow gauge of common sense and worldly prudence, and that no divine work can be built on other foundations

than utter humility and a love that does not count the cost. The whole question was reduced to a very simple proposition. Were all these difficulties a sign of God's disapproval, or were they sent to test the foundation? Clearly there was only one way of settling the question : the community must go into retreat. So for eight days, Mademoiselle Smet and her daughters filed into a side chapel of St. Merry's, regardless alike of inquisitive glances and the noise of the traffic outside, while the Abbé Gabriel expatiated on the great Eternal Truths. "During this retreat," said the Father, "you will have but one object in view, to find out whether you have truly the spirit of sacrifice, of renunciation and abnegation. Let each one examine herself before God and see if she is truly where God wishes her to be, if she is indeed following her vocation, so that at the close of this retreat the work may either be founded or destroyed."

No startling revelations of the Divine Will appear to have been made during these days of recollection ; God let things take their normal course, under His guiding Hand. Mademoiselle Smet made yet another attempt at reconciliation, but the differences between herself and the Abbé Largentier were too deep-seated to admit of more than a temporary truce. The poor man had evidently reckoned on a meek, docile character, completely under his thumb, but instead of this, he found himself confronted by a clear-sighted intelligence that never lost sight of the object in view, and a fearless independence that acted regardless of consequences.

Not only did Mademoiselle Smet refuse to submit

to his spiritual guidance, but she had the audacity to dismiss a certain young cousin of his, whom she considered unsuitable for religious life. Really, the limit of endurance had been reached ; he must make one last attempt to reduce the Superior to submission. Knowing the dire poverty of the small Community he addressed a formal note to the Superior demanding a speedy repayment of all the money spent by him on this foundation. Eugénie's eyes opened wide with astonishment. The Abbé Largentier had never spent a penny on his foundation, the expenses of which had been almost entirely defrayed by Eugénie and her relations. She hurried to the presbytery to demand an interview with her self-styled creditor. But the good Abbé Largentier had discovered several pressing engagements, which, much to his regret, would prevent the meeting.

On Sunday morning, Mademoiselle Lardin received a letter from her mother, which she read through very attentively, and then, with smouldering fire in her dark eyes, she handed it to her Superior. Eugénie Smet at once recognized the Abbé Largentier's handwriting. Why had he been writing to Mademoiselle Lardin's mother ? She could hardly believe her eyes as she read the following words : " Mademoiselle Smet is quite mad, and the Abbé Gabriel has decided to send her back to her family. As for me, I have been excluded from the work altogether. If it should happen that Mademoiselle Smet continues to carry on the Foundation, would you wish your daughter to be on my side, or on Mademoiselle Smet's."

This was not the first time that the Abbé had tried to win over her loyal daughter, and Eugénie Smet could scarcely control herself as she hurried to the presbytery, and placed the incriminating missive in the Abbé Gabriel's hands. The fiery Abbé made no attempt to master his feelings. He literally bounded from his chair, exclaiming, " It is not true, I have never said that. He had better never put his foot inside my house again. I will shut the door in his face! "

But although the letter exaggerated matters, the Abbé Gabriel had been somewhat influenced by all the grievances poured into his ears by Mademoiselle Fanny R. and the Abbé Largentier. No doubt it had occurred to him that the foundation might develop more peacefully, without this somewhat masterful young woman, who had such very definite ideas as to what she wanted, and such disconcertingly direct methods of obtaining it. He resolved to apply a final and severe test, and to do it there and then. Looking her straight in the face, he told her point-blank, that after thinking well over the whole situation, he had decided to transfer the spiritual guidance of the little flock to Mademoiselle Fanny R., and that Eugénie Smet must in future confine herself to the management of external affairs. The Abbé was watching her face narrowly while pronouncing his judgment. She little knew that her fate hung in the balance, and that a frown or even a slight shadow of annoyance would have finished her career as Foundress. But her clear, candid eyes met the priest's scrutinizing look without flinching, not a tremor passed over her expressive face,

although her quick intelligence had instantly realized that all authority was in fact to be taken out of her hands : that instead of being Superior of the Community, she was to play the part of a benefactress. She who had insisted on a true religious formation for her daughters was deemed unsuitable to guide them in this high vocation. Without a moment's hesitation, she answered : " I am ready for anything, even to return to my family, if it be God's will." These simple words, spoken so quietly without any apparent effort, proved conclusively her habitual attitude of mind.

The Abbé's tender old heart was touched to the quick, he was too experienced in dealing with souls to doubt her sincerity. As he looked at her truthful eyes, he seemed to read her very soul ; such utter humility, such complete submission, marked her out as God's chosen instrument. She had been weighed in the balance and not found wanting.

" Indeed, there is no question of your returning to your parents," he continued after a long pause, " this work must be carried on and directed towards its divinely appointed goal." Once more, Eugénie bowed to his judgment, and after arranging to meet the Abbé Largentier there on the following day, she went away.

The Abbé Largentier was the first to arrive at the appointed meeting-place the next day, and although the door was not shut in his face, his reception was distinctly cool. The Abbé Gabriel opened the conversation by saying very curtly : " Mademoiselle Smet has shown me the letter which you wrote to Madame

Lardin." The Abbé started involuntarily and turned pale, but not a word could he find in self-defence.

After a slight pause the parish priest continued : "I have intimated to Mademoiselle Smet, that on account of all these difficulties, she must in future confine herself to the exterior management of the Community. I watched her the whole time, and she never even flinched. Had she raised the slightest objection, I should have advised her to return to her family, for she would have been unworthy to carry on God's work. She, however, acquiesced in all I said."

All that was best and noblest in the Abbé Largentier rose up and responded to the quiet heroism of this woman whom he had so grievously misjudged. His own utter unworthiness seemed mirrored in her noble example. "She has given me a lesson which shall not be wasted on me. I will stand aside. Henceforth, I will do my best to make this foundation better known, but I will never again take any active part whatever in the direction of it."

The Abbé had left the room but a few moments, when Eugénie came in, and heard exactly what had taken place. Her generous nature could never harbour a grudge, she must go herself and assure the Abbé Largentier that all grievances against him were forgotten. Taking a companion with her, she hurried up the three flights of stairs to his rooms, and rang the bell. The door was opened by Mademoiselle Largentier, who said that her brother was at dinner. "I will wait," said Eugénie, as she stepped inside. After

a few moments, the Abbé came into the room, and the co-founders shook hands in silence. "Father," she said, "we cannot go on like this, I will forget all the pain you have caused me." "Let us throw a veil over the past," said the Abbé Largentier, upon which the two visitors retired.

Henceforth, the Abbé Largentier ceased to take any active part in the foundation. Although Eugénie felt that this generous withdrawal wiped out the past, yet she knew that any effort at further co-operation would only hamper God's work. Their paths had crossed for a time, but must now separate for ever.

Soon afterwards, the Abbé Gabriel, Vicar of St. Merry, undertook the spiritual direction of the young religious, who regarded him as a "beloved and loving Father," rather than as an Ecclesiastical Superior. Divine Providence had sent this friend to help the Foundress through a very critical time, and to take the place of those two who had befriended her so generously when she first came to Paris. For Père Aussant was dying in a Dominican Monastery near Toulouse, and Madame Jurien was staying in the neighbourhood, where she could sometimes see her beloved director and friend. Many letters passed between Eugénie and the Vicomtesse, who continued to take the keenest interest in every detail of the new Foundation. Her letters always stimulated Eugénie's anxious mind, and spurred her on to fresh efforts.

But it was in reality the saintly Curé d'Ars who kept Eugénie from faltering. Although they never actually met, his influence was ever leading her on, step by step,

and his unbounded confidence in her divine mission carried her through all difficulties.

A letter written by Eugénie to the Abbé Toccanier, the following June, shows how deeply she appreciated the Curé's help :

> " Dear Father, Oh ! if only I could be transported to Ars and breathe a little of that heavenly atmosphere it would refresh me, body and soul. I am stifled here in Paris, where I have been installed ever since March 25. I should most certainly have succumbed to the trials that are overwhelming me, were it not for all you have told me from the Curé d'Ars. I will hide nothing from you, and with all my characteristic sincerity I must admit that I have come to the end of my patience."

Indeed, it would be almost impossible to exaggerate the difficulties and annoyances that met her at every turn.

In the midst of many anxieties she received a letter from the Abbé Toccanier saying : " The Curé smiled when he heard of all your trials, and said : ' Tell her these crosses are flowers which will soon bear fruit.' You have thought a great deal before making up your mind, you have prayed, asked advice, and pondered well over all the sacrifices entailed ; you have every guarantee that you are fulfilling the Will of God. What, then, is lacking now ? The energy which God alone can give for a work so dear to Him ? The Curé has repeated several times with the deepest conviction : ' This community

is bound to succeed.' But you yourself alone can tell how much anxiety and work and suffering it will cost you before this work is consolidated. If God is with you, who can be against you ? "

All friendly intercourse with Mademoiselle Joly had ceased when the communicating door between the two suites of rooms had been locked by her. One day, when the sisters were just sitting down to dinner, the front-door bell rang with a violence that could only presage some fresh development in the campaign. A tremor ran through the community. After a brief consultation, one of the number, pre-eminent for her courage, went with shaking knees and trembling hands to open the door. The enemy stood on the threshold, and demanded the instant removal—not of the sister's head—but of a chair which had been lent to the Community in pre-war days. The chair was hastily removed from under one of the sisters at the dinner-table ; perhaps one of the energetic group who had wished to take her meals standing. By degrees, most of the scanty furniture disappeared. " Why, you have hardly anything left," exclaimed the Abbé Gabriel one day, as he looked round the bare rooms, " but at any rate, you have a little peace now." Then, taking up the list of promised subscriptions, he promptly entered his name for 200 francs.

Mademoiselle Joly was determined to get rid of these annoying lodgers. The rent was soon almost doubled, and the immediate evacuation of the largest room was next demanded. It was then the height of summer, the sisters were already suffering severely from the

want of air, and now four beds had to be taken out of the largest dormitory, and squeezed into other already over-crowded rooms. If this state of affairs continued much longer, the whole Community would be lying in hospital. When would that coveted house in the rue de la Barouillère come into her possession ? Divine Providence had shown it to her in such an unmistakable manner that she could not possibly look at any other house in Paris.

Meanwhile, negotiations were proceeding in the leisurely manner characteristic of lawyers. Towards the end of May, Mademoiselle Smet was informed that Monsieur d'Assonvillers was not inclined to let the house at all, but would sell it for 150,000 francs. Eugénie calmly awaited developments, and none but her most intimate friends guessed the intense anxiety she felt for her suffering daughters. Another month passed, when her lawyer, Monsieur Buchon, said to her one day: "If Monsieur d'Assonvillers changes his mind (which is highly improbable) and consents to let his house instead of selling it, you must have at least 1,000 francs in the Bank to pay the first quarter's rent."

Eugénie Smet had exactly 500 francs to her credit, and went immediately to Our Lady of Victories to demand the necessary balance. "Dear Mother, we must have 1,000 francs," said the "spoilt child." "I am completely worn out, physically and mentally. I really cannot go begging, I rely on your dear motherly protection."

That same evening at recreation, when her daughters

were busily threading beads, Eugénie recounted all the adventures of the day in the vivid language that was one of her great charms. It was a hot, sultry evening. Every now and then a slight movement of the curtains at the window gave some faint notion of a refreshing breeze wandering about outside, and trying in vain to penetrate the heavy atmosphere of the small, crowded room. The Superior's lively chatter died away like the breeze, oppressed by the stifling heat. Silence fell on the little circle until one of the sisters begged leave to fetch a glass of water. She returned in a few moments and handed her Superior a letter which had just been delivered. Mademoiselle Smet looked at the envelope somewhat listlessly ; the handwriting conveyed nothing to her, but she had scarcely broken the seal, when a gasp of surprise electrified the room. Her daughters looked up, and saw a small slip of paper in her fingers. It was a cheque for 500 francs, and a petition for prayers from a complete stranger, who had heard about Mademoiselle Smet's work from a mutual friend!

The following morning she hastened to consult Monsieur Buchon, her lawyer, who received her with an unusual warmth of manner. "Have you had the letter I posted to you last night ? " he asked. Eugénie shook her head. " I left home very early," she replied. The lawyer then went on rapidly: "You must indeed rejoice. Providence is certainly on your side. Monsieur d'Assonvillers has changed his mind ; nobody knows why! He no longer wants to sell his house, but to let it, and what is more, he will not let it to anyone but

Mademoiselle Smet." Eugénie was speechless as Monsieur Buchon grew more excited : " Go back as quickly as ever you can," he said, " and get two of your friends to come as witnesses ; I will follow in a cab, and take you all to the lawyer. I have promised to be there by 11 o'clock." With that, he hurried her out of the house. Her feet seemed hardly to touch the pavement as she flew back to the rue St. Martin. One glance at the happy faces there showed that the good news was already known. Monsieur Buchon's " urgent " note lay open on the table. Not only were the sisters wreathed in smiles, but St. Joseph was wreathed with garlands of roses, and the surplus wealth of the establishment had been expended on two candles which were burning on each side of his statue. There was only time for a brief interchange of excited exclamations, and Monsieur Buchon's cab rattled up to the door. Eugénie Lardin and Fanny R. accompanied their Superior, who entreated them not to address her as " Mother " during the approaching interview.

Monsieur d'Assonvillers was already at the office when they arrived, and after greeting the ladies with charming old-fashioned courtesy, they all settled down to business. His lawyer proceeded to read the agreement, threading his way cautiously through the maze of legal phrases which surrounded the simple transaction of letting a house.

Mademoiselle Smet listened with complete composure as the lawyer reeled out numerous incomprehensible clauses by which the landlord safe-guarded

himself against any possible encroachments on the part of his unfortunate tenants. How was she ever going to fulfil these utterly unintelligible obligations? Nevertheless, she blindly agreed to everything, saying to herself, that whereas her Heavenly Father had provided the house, He would surely carry out the various charges incurred thereby.

When the lawyer had at last finished reading the document, he laid it down on the table for the contracting parties to affix their signatures. Monsieur d'Assonvillers put on his spectacles and proceeded to sharpen the point of his quill pen. Just as he was about to sign the lease, he looked across at Mademoiselle Smet with a gracious smile, and said : " How glad I am to have settled this business with you, Mademoiselle. They were trying to make me let or sell my house to some people who meant to turn it into a convent later on."

" Indeed, Monsieur," answered Eugénie calmly.

" Yes, indeed, and I was not at all pleased about it," added the nobleman. Had he not been bending over the document, he might have noticed an embarrassed expression cross his tenant's face, as she exchanged glances with her lawyer.

Eugénie's frank nature abhorred any deception, and a tinge of bitterness mingled with her joy as she left the lawyer's office. She had, in fact, obtained possession of the house under false pretences. " You are a little bit scrupulous," said Mgr. Chalandon, when told of the deception, " but do as you like about it." Once more, Eugénie sought an interview with Monsieur d'Assonvillers who again received her with that frank

courtesy which showed he was still unaware of the designs of this unscrupulous tenant. At last, the dreadful secret was disclosed, and he knew that she actually contemplated turning this house of his into a convent as soon as possible. There was something irresistible in this young woman, who looked him fearlessly in the face, as she told him of the slight deception into which she had drifted almost unconsciously. The strained expression in her eyes spoke of wakeful nights and harassed days. What a treasure she must have been in her home ! Why should she waste her youthful vigour on this mad enterprise ? " Do not you think the noblest work of all would be to comfort your father in his old age ? " said the old man very gently. " My mother and father would not prevent me from responding to God's call," she answered, " however much they may suffer, they are convinced it is my vocation."

Monsieur d'Assonvillers was completely captivated. He had not the slightest wish to cancel the lease ; not only should she have the house, but the furniture and looking-glasses as well. Eugénie glanced round the richly furnished and be-mirrored room, and decided that it was hardly a suitable background for a religious community. She pictured Mademoiselle Trigory keeping strict custody of the eyes, and trying not to look at the reflection that would meet her at every turn. So the kind offer was gently but firmly refused, and Eugénie went away without one tinge of bitterness to mar her joy.

The lease had been signed on June 19, and on the first of July, the Community would take possession of

the new house. Thanks to Mademoiselle Joly the removal would be a very simple matter, she had already removed most of the furniture, and what remained presented a somewhat maimed appearance, suggestive of a rubbish heap. There were chairs without legs, clocks without hands, forks without prongs, kettles without spouts, etc., etc.

One day at recreation the sisters amused themselves by drawing up an inventory of their household possessions. This celebrated document is so characteristic of the light-hearted gaiety which carried them through all their difficulties, that it well deserves a place in their history. It runs as follows :

"A truly accurate inventory of the furniture owned by the Helpers of the Holy Souls, compiled on June 10, 1856, at the midday recreation, and approved by the whole Community :

11 beds with or without bedding.
2 benches, 5 small tables.
5 chairs, 1 with no seat, and the others more or less decrepit.
3 lamps, of which two use more oil than they give light.
3 clocks, 1 always fast, the other always slow, and the 3rd does not go at all.
8 glasses, the 9th with no foot, it having disappeared the day this inventory was taken.
4 small glasses.
9 forks and spoons, some of tin, with either handles or prongs missing.

12 knives, including 3 carving knives, and 2 which will neither open nor shut.
1 mustard-pot, brand new, bought for our Mother's feast.
13 bowls, one leaks, and one is very rickety.
3 brooms of which 2 are wanting bristles.
1 long-handled brush for polishing.
Jacquot, his cage and his stand.
Feather-broom, supplied by Jacquot.
6 statues of Our Lady, 3 of St. Joseph, 1 of St. Vincent de Paul.
1 dummy religious (used as mannequin for trying on costumes).
A grand collection of books, pictures, statues and rosaries.
Personnel of the Community :
2 mothers who have 1 head.
8 sisters who have no heads at all.
One single heart."

A few days before the great move, Eugénie met her landlord in the rue de la Barouillère, "Madame d'Assonvillers must miss you very much, are you not thinking of going soon to see her in Normandy?" asked Eugénie with transparent candour. The old man looked at her quizzically. "I see, Mademoiselle, that you want to turn me out, do not worry yourself, I shall settle down in the harness room." As a matter of fact, Eugénie was not at all keen on her landlord inspecting the removal. The chairs and tables looked shabby enough in the dark rooms of the rue St. Martin

but when brought out into the glaring summer sun, and left lying about on the pavement in the way characteristic of furniture removers, she feared that her landlord would not consider he had sufficient guarantee for his rent. However, Eugénie's sister Emma was a cesourceful young person, and when the great day rame, and the vans had been loaded at the rue St. Martin, she hurried to the rue de la Barouillère devoutly hoping that some pressing engagement had carried the landlord off for the day. But no, he was walking up and down the courtyard when she arrived, and there was no alternative but to walk up and down with him.

Presently the vans clattered into the yard and the men scrambled down and began to unload; Emma Smet watched proceedings with complete composure. Monsieur d'Assonvillers departed, shortly afterwards, not waiting to watch the rest of the unloading.

Eugénie Smet was the last to leave the rue St. Martin, carrying with her a statue of Notre-Dame des Victoires, which was given a place of honour in the new house. The tired but radiant Community had scarcely finished an impromptu meal, when the Abbé Gabriel was announced. "It is as good as being in the country," he cried, as he beamed on everybody and everything. The following morning they all went to Mass at the Lazarist church, where, six months before, Eugénie had alighted, after telling her cabman to take her wherever the Blessed Sacrament was to be found! It was the Feast of the Visitation, and the beautiful words of the Epistle sounded strangely appropriate. "The

winter is now past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers have appeared in our land."

She knew that many more winters would come and go, and many a dark rainy day, but for the present, she would bask in the warm rays of the sun and revel in the flowers that strewed her path. In her deep humility she never thought of applying to herself the words of St. Elizabeth, "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord."

Chapter VI

THE MOTHER HOUSE

A FEW days before leaving the rue St. Martin, the Abbé Gabriel, who had accepted the office of Ecclesiastical Superior, arrived in his usual unceremonious manner and announced : " I am going to give you your names in religion : Mademoiselle Smet will be called Marie de la Providence ; Mademoiselle Lardin, Marie du Sacré Cœur ; Mademoiselle Lobert, Marie de St. Augustin ; Mademoiselle Molard, Marie de la Presentation[1] ; Mademoiselle Trigory, Marie de la Nativité ; and the four Lay-Sisters will be called Marie de St. Marthe, Marie de la Visitation, Marie de St. Stanislaus, and Marie de l'Assomption."

It was well to have religious names, thought the Foundress, but more important still was the necessity of a sound religious formation, but how could she give her daughters something that she had never received herself ? Her natural activity, keen intelligence, and sound common sense, allied to a child-like trust in God had carried her through innumerable difficulties, but she realized that the time had now come when a very special help was needed. She was to grope in

[1]The name of Marie de la Presentation (Mademoiselle Molard) was changed later on to Marie de St. Joseph, to commemorate the acquisition of the premises, No. 16 rue de la Barouillère, through the intercession of that great Saint.

Mother House, Paris, 1856

the dark for another two years before this "special help" was vouchsafed her!

In the meantime the Community prayed, suffered, laboured, for the Holy Souls, according to their motto, and longed eagerly for the day when Our Lord would take up His abode in their midst. The best room in the house was set apart for Him, and a small wooden altar erected. At the same time a Louis XV tabernacle, together with a well-authenticated reliquary were discovered in an old curiosity shop. It was a great day for the Community when our Lady of Providence arrived from Loos, and smiled down on them from her place in the Sanctuary. "Some day I shall be in a chapel," she had whispered years before to Eugénie Smet kneeling at her feet.

On July 17, not much more than a fortnight after they had moved to the new house, Mgr. Chalandon came to bless the little chapel dedicated to Our Lady Immaculate. Soon afterwards the Archbishop himself came to inspect the Convent, accompanied by the Abbé Gabriel to whom he gave permission to say the first Mass as soon as the Sacred Vessels had been found. "This little family is but as a grain of mustard seed, but the grain will develop into a great tree in which the birds of the air will rest," said His Grace, as he expatiated on the motto—Pray, Suffer, Labour for the Souls in Purgatory.

On August 29, Mère de la Providence, having charged Mère de l'Immaculée Conception with the direction of the Community in her absence, returned

home to Loos. Not only did the Foundress need to recoup her strength, but she hoped that some of her rich friends would replenish the exhausted treasury of the Community.

No sooner had Mère de la Providence returned home, than in spite of all her energy and determination she passed again through a veritable crisis, when all the difficulties of her stupendous task rose up and seemed to bar the way. She thought of all the lights she had already received, and all the many and unmistakable signs of Divine favour, and yet there remained one apparently insuperable obstacle—her own frail health. Moreover, the kind friends who had helped her through so many difficulties, had for the time being failed her. Père Aussant was dying, Madame Jurien had returned to Toulouse after a short stay in Paris, and the excellent Curé of Loos took a very gloomy view of the whole position. "I have been thinking it over," he said, "and have come to the conclusion that your position in Paris is impossible. Trust to my grey hairs and return once more to the certain good you were doing here, instead of attempting an uncertainty which may perhaps end in failure. I do not advise you to abandon the foundation, but merely to become the benefactress and even the Foundress, without, however, joining it as a religious." And then again some words of the Curé d'Ars repeated by a stranger to Mère du Sacré Cœur, when he was said to have advised "fewer subjects and a better selection," added to her anxieties. Indeed, she was in need of all her supernatural strength, and the Curé d'Ars'

"Courage, all will be well" helped to lighten her burden and teach her that God's Infinite Plenitude was all sufficing. The Abbé Gabriel, honest and kind-hearted, was far too masculine to understand the intricacies of a woman's heart. "You make too much of your feelings" might be true enough, but it was poor comfort to a troubled soul. "My child, you do not face the situation resolutely enough," was all the help she had from Madame Jurien, "that is why you are so unhappy and worried. This constant looking back is weakening your moral strength. You are neither at Lille, nor in Paris. You are not doing the good work you used to do, and you are running the risk of compromising the good which God is expecting of you." The Curé d'Ars went still further when he refused to pray for her recovery. She had offered herself as a victim, why then cry for mercy?

One night as she lay awake, the silence of the country-side was broken by a cock crowing in the distance; instantly, a vivid picture came before her mind of St. Peter warming himself at a fire, and denying all connection with his Divine Master. Was she perhaps on the verge of a like treachery? As the distant sound died away, she heard in the depths of her heart the voice that had spoken to her so clearly on other similar occasions: "If you now disown the work which God has entrusted to you, every time you hear the cock crow you will remember your faithlessness." Indeed, she did not wish to be unfaithful, and if she has left us such a frank, loyal report of her struggles with her sensitive feelings, there is not one

word that throws a shadow of doubt on the complete union of her will with the Divine Will.

On October 28, Mère de la Providence returned to Paris, laden with presents from her friends and relations. Great was the excitement as the various boxes were unpacked, and vestments, altar-linen, and a ciborium were disclosed. At last, they could look forward to the day when the Holy Sacrifice would be offered on the small altar, and the glow of the red lamp would show that the Tabernacle was no longer empty. On November 5, the Abbé Gabriel vested in the little Sacristy and proceeded to offer up the first Community Mass. He said the Mass of the Octave of All Saints, and when the consecration bell announced that the Divine Master had taken possession of His new home, joy and thanksgiving filled the hearts of the worshippers. As soon as the Mass was over, Mère Marie de la Providence, as the order of the ceremony prescribed, intoned the *De Profundis*, the family prayer of the Helpers of the Holy Souls. On Saturday, the 8th of the same month, the house was consecrated to the Blessed Virgin in a most special manner. Mère de la Providence had been kneeling before that image of the Immaculate Mother which she had looked upon for years as her greatest treasure. Once in her youth it had seemed to her that from its lips she heard the words : " One day I shall be in a chapel," and now this intimation appeared to her in the light of a prophecy about to be realized. The beloved statue was placed at the right-hand side of the altar in the humble sanctuary, and as she prayed near it, the

First Chapel Mother-House, 1856

thought arose in her mind of delivering up into the hands of her heavenly Mother all the cares and responsibilities involved in her position as Foundress and Superioress. She told her daughters of her desire ; they warmly sympathized with her devout intention, and on the appointed day, the first Saturday on which the Divine Master finally dwelt amongst them, the altar of His Holy Mother was adorned to the best of their power in honour of her installation as the Superioress of the little congregation devoted to the most forlorn of her children. After Mass, Mère de la Providence knelt before the dear image, and, laying at its feet two keys, read, her voice trembling with emotion, the following solemn Act of Consecration, which she had composed in her honour :

" Holy Mary, Our Mother, we place at thy feet the keys of this house and we implore thee to become the Lady and Mistress of our little Society. What signal benefits hast thou not bestowed on us from the very beginning ! What graces have we not asked and received ! What motherly care hast thou not lavished on our feeble, unstable souls ! In placing in thy hands our spiritual and temporal interests we know well thou wilt repay our trust a hundredfold. Everything here, dear Mother, speaks to us of thy love. Our sacrifices testify to our gratitude, and the Holy Souls whom we have delivered are singing a hymn of thanksgiving. We will strive to deserve the name of privileged children which thy maternal heart has bestowed on us. Our

sole study henceforth shall be to imitate thee. Thou art the Mother of Sorrows, we will be the children of sacrifice. Thou art the Help of the weak, we will be the angels of the poor. Thou art the Comfort of the afflicted, we will weep with those that weep. Thou art the Refuge of sinners, we will sacrifice ourselves to gain souls for Christ, our Lord. Thou art the Queen of Martyrs, we will be Martyrs of the Rule. Thou art Queen of the Apostles, we will work only for the greater Glory of God. Thou art above all, O Mary, Our Lady of Providence for our little Society. O deign likewise to be the Providence of all those whom we have left in the world. Be the Providence of those who guide us in the narrow path of perfection. Be the Providence of the Souls in Purgatory for whom we wish to pray, suffer, and labour. Remember, O Mary, that by accepting the keys of this House thou dost make thyself responsible for our spiritual and temporal welfare. Dear, tender, Mother, thou knowest all those whom our gratitude wishes to bring to thy notice, bless them all ; prepare for them in Heaven the reward which we seek in vain to offer them on earth. May we all be one family together, which, after being the object of thy tender solicitude in this our exile, may one day form thy crown in our heavenly country. Amen."

In the afternoon, Mère Marie du Sacré Cœur was appointed Assistant Superior and Mistress of Novices. It was a happy day, and when

Present Chapel Mother-House, Paris

they all assembled in the chapel for night prayers a solemn *Te Deum* was chanted to thank Our Blessed Lord for taking up His abode with them. How could they fear the future when He was in their midst ?

Our Lady of Providence was truly the Superior of the Society, and the future showed with what maternal care she fulfilled her charge. One day there was great excitement in the street. One of the Imperial coaches drew up at the convent, and a footman in gorgeous livery opened the door for the Emperor's chaplain, who had brought with him some bulky parcels which were eagerly unpacked; a richly embroidered vestment and a Monstrance delighted all eyes. But what was the use of a Monstrance without the permission to use it ? Mère de la Providence thereupon drew up a long list of special days for Exposition and Benediction, and, with a letter from the Abbé Gabriel, she proceeded to the Archbishop's house with even more than her usual confidence. In spite of protests from His Grace's servant, she almost forced her way into his presence, and presented her petition. The Archbishop looked at the petition, and then at the petitioner in astonishment. " My dear child," he exclaimed, " a Community of thirty years' standing would scarcely dare to ask for such a list of privileges." " But, Your Grace," expostulated Mère de la Providence, " would Divine Providence have allowed the Bishop of Nancy to obtain a Monstrance for us, if God did not mean you to give us the permission to use it ? " Archbishop Sibour looked again at the long list of favours requested. " My child, everyone who

reads this list will blame me for it—it is too much, I cannot do it," he said emphatically.

" Your Grace, I do implore you," she said, praying interiorly with all her heart. There was silence in the room His Grace took up a pen, hesitated a moment, and then laid it down again on the table, shaking his head. Once more, the pen was taken up. Mère de la Providence held her breath and watched . . . but again it dropped on to the table. She was by this time trembling with emotion, and determined to make one last desperate effort.

" Your Grace, do as you like, but the Souls in Purgatory are holding your pen." She spoke with such deep conviction that the Archbishop looked at her again. " Do you really believe that, my child," he asked gently. " Indeed I do, Your Grace," was the confident answer. Once more, he took up the pen. " I will sign it," he said, " and will add an extra Benediction."

Little did the Archbishop think that in less than a fortnight, he would have crossed the threshold of Eternity, when the favours he had just bestowed on the young Community would be repaid a thousandfold.

Although as yet the Community had no fixed rule, a regular course of instruction on religious life was given by Père Reculon, S.J., and all were eagerly looking forward to the day when they could bind themselves irrevocably to their Divine Spouse.

Yielding at last to the Mother Superior's earnest entreaties, the Abbé Gabriel consented to allow her and five of her daughters to make annual Vows.

House and Chapel, Montmartre, Paris

Present Chapel Mother-House, Paris

The Père Reculon agreed to give the Brides-elect a short retreat in preparation for the great day. It was during this memorable retreat that the custom of singing instead of chanting the *De Profundis* was introduced, and also the recitation in common after Mass of the prayer "Behold, O Kind and Most Sweet Jesus."[1]

The great day dawned at last, and on the morning of December 27, Mère Marie de la Providence and her Assistant, Mère Marie du Sacré Cœur, entered the chapel, wearing black merino dresses, with wide sleeves and ample capes of the same material. Three other Sisters were also allowed the great privilege—Mère Marie du Suffrage, the ex-Trappistine, now Mère Marie de la Nativité; Marie de St. Joseph; and a lay sister, Marie de St. Stanislaus, who did not persevere.

The Abbé Gabriel, assisted by the Abbé Largentier, intoned the *Veni Creator* and then made a touching exhortation. Turning towards those who were to pronounce their Vows he put to them several questions taken from the ceremonial book of the nuns of the Saint Cœur de Marie, which they answered all together. But suddenly the good Abbé asked a question which was not included in the Ceremonial. "My daughters, will you promise in presence of this company to consecrate yourselves for ever to the care of the sick poor?" There was dead silence in the chapel. Much as Mère de la Providence loved tending the sick poor, she had not contemplated binding her daughters

[1] By special permission from Rome, given later on, the singing of the *De Profundis* in the Society is permitted before the Blessed Sacrament exposed.

irrevocably to this work. " Say yes, at the foot of this altar," cried out the Abbé in a voice of command. All eyes were turned on the Mother Foundress, who, after a moment's pause, made a sign to her companions and all answered : " Yes."

The Holy Sacrifice was then offered, and at the *Domine, non sum dignus* the six candidates approached the altar rails each holding a lighted candle, and pronounced the formula of the vows used by the nuns of the Saint Cœur de Marie, with a special addition in favour of the Souls in Purgatory. A fervent *Te Deum* concluded the ceremony, and the rest of the day was spent in silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, exposed for the first time in the chapel.

The heart of the Foundress must have been well-nigh overflowing with happiness as she looked back on the year that was fast drawing to a close, and realized how wonderfully she had been guided, step by step, along a path beset with difficulties. It was not quite a year since she had first come to Paris, and before its close she was a professed religious, and Superior of a fervent though small Community. Their financial state was precarious indeed, and the future seemed equally uncertain, but her Heavenly Father knew that food and raiment were needful, as well as a house, and He had never yet failed those who trusted blindly to His care.

Had not Mgr. Chalandon in his New Year's letter to Eugénie Smet at the beginning of this very year said : " May God make this year for you the most beautiful and most holy of all."

Blanchelande, Normandy

Chapel of the Novitiate, Versailles

On January 3, the Abbé Gabriel came to give Benediction before starting for Rome. The *Tantum ergo* had been sung, and he was just about to take the Monstrance into his hands, when he was seized with a sudden inspiration, and turning round, he cried : " Let us say a *De Profundis* for the souls who are at this moment appearing before God."

The psalm was accordingly recited, in spite of the Sisters' surprise at this unusual addition to the service. They were, however, long since accustomed to their Ecclesiastical Superior's unconventional ways. The good Abbé himself could not account for the sudden impulse, but as he was saying good-bye, the whole house resounded with the violent ringing of the front door bell. A carriage had drawn up outside, and a servant from the Archbishop's House asked if the Abbé Gabriel could come at once—Archbishop Sibour had been assassinated in the streets.

A few days later Mère de la Providence was kneeling beside the dead body of her benefactor, clothed in full pontificals, as he lay in state in the " Chapelle ardente." She thought of her first momentous interview when that face, now so still and white, had been illuminated with a smile that had seemed like the seal of divine approval on her work. Deep gratitude for all his kindness filled her own heart, and the hearts of all her daughters, and over flowed into fervent prayers for the welfare of his soul.

The new Society, which had begun in such a humble way, was gradually becoming better known. Many high ecclesiastics, Bishops, Archbishops, and Cardinals,

expressed their approval of the work, and several new postulants sought admittance. As the Community increased in numbers, it became more and more necessary to extend the premises. Many of the sisters were sleeping in the corridors—only the Mother Superior had a room to herself. They made the best of all the inconveniences, longing for the day when the property would legally be theirs. What was the use of altering and improving a house which at any moment might be sold over their heads ? St. Joseph had never failed them yet and his month was approaching, so hopes ran high. It had long been the custom in the Community, when funds were very low, to recite the Litany of St. Joseph, but instead of " pray for us," they substituted " pay for us." When they heard rumours of other would-be purchasers of No. 16, they varied their Litany. " St. Joseph, Head of the Holy Family, give us the house : St. Joseph, most just, give us the house." But St. Joseph refused to be hurried, and although the rent was always forthcoming, several months passed before the purchase of the house was completed.

In the meantime the Community struggled along bravely and cheerfully, with spirits that seldom flagged. A precarious income was made by threading beads, making shawl-fringes, and giving music lessons. The struggle to provide the bare necessaries of life left but little time for religious formation in the strict sense of the word. Almighty God was putting them through a novitiate of suffering to test the strength of their vocation and unite them ever closer in the bonds of

fraternal charity. The Cross entered deeply into their daily life ; and at Ars the holy Curé, hearing of this, exclaimed : " A house built on the Cross will fear neither storm nor rain, for it is marked with the Divine Seal." They never knew from day to day whether they would have a roof over their heads, or food enough to eat, but this very uncertainty tended to deepen and intensify that blind confidence in God which has ever since been one of the chief characteristics of the Society. How else could they learn it ?

Just as the sons of St. Ignatius learnt their lesson of loving obedience before any constitutions were given to them, so the Helpers of the Holy Souls were rooted and founded in the broad principle of loving confidence before any rules filled in the details of their life.

Mère Marie de la Providence inspired them all with her own indomitable courage, meeting the trials of privation and uncertainty in a joyous spirit that laughed at difficulties. Sacrifice was their joy, and however scanty the food, there was always something put aside for the sick poor. If their poverty might have tempted St. Francis to envy, surely the mortifications of their life might have compared favourably with the strictest Trappistine convent. There were no fires nor heating apparatus in the house, food was neither nourishing nor abundant, clothes were too thick for summer and far too thin to keep out the cold of winter. But long faces and grumbling voices were unknown. The most painful duties were always the most popular, and instead of having to urge on her daughters, Mère

de la Providence was constantly obliged to restrain their eagerness for mortifications.

This hard, laborious life was a severe test of character, and many of the most promising postulants were obliged to give up the struggle, and try their vocation elsewhere, but those who persevered, in spite of difficulties, became the true foundation-stones of the Society, firm and strong.

Towards the end of June, Mère de la Providence went to Loos for a well-earned rest to strengthen her for fresh labours. But in a very short time she was back again in Paris, with renewed energy to meet the ever-increasing difficulties of her great work.

Her first consideration was the purchase of the house. The Curé d'Ars had suggested that some wealthy lady might advance the money, but unfortunately, their patroness, Vicomtesse Jurien, had never considered it a suitable habitation for religious. However, her opposition gradually broke down, and she agreed to buy the house in three instalments of 150,000 francs, payable in three years, beginning the following year. Monsieur d'Assonvillers insisted very courteously on a deposit of 30,000 francs as soon as the deed was signed. Thanks to Monsieur Guilhem, this difficulty was overcome, and yet the landlord hesitated and temporized, in the hope of other more favourable offers. November was approaching, and Mère de la Providence waited and prayed and trusted the Holy Souls.

On November 14, with a written agreement she went full of confidence, to talk matters over with her

landlord. "I am filled with admiration for your practical common sense, and your capacity for organization," said the old man. "It is not often one meets these qualities in a woman." Mère de la Providence smiled to herself, remembering the help that Divine Providence had given her. "I would never have believed it possible," continued Monsieur d'Assonvillers, "that you could have accomplished so much in such a short time, considering the state of affairs when you first came to see me." The holy Foundress knew well the power of prayer: "Very well, Monsieur," she replied, "since you seem to have such confidence in me, I hope you will give me the preference in this transaction, and that you will sell me the house without any securities or mortgages," and thereupon she placed an agreement on the table by which the landlord promised to give her the first refusal of the house. Monsieur d'Assonvillers tried very courteously to evade this appeal, but all in vain, and, needless to say, she went away with the signed agreement in her pocket, and a *Deo gratias* in her heart.

Favours seldom come singly, and this same day brought the Community the fulfilment of a long-cherished desire. Their daily Mass had always been as uncertain as their daily food. Sometimes a Franciscan Father would come, at other times a Dominican or a Marist would give his services, but, hitherto, no regular chaplain had been appointed. The Jesuit Fathers in the rue de Sèvres generally came to the rescue when the Community was in a difficulty, and Mère de la Providence would have dearly loved to give

her daughters the inestimable boon of a Jesuit director, if only St. Ignatius had not forbidden it.

On November 14, the day on which she had obtained the written agreement from Monsieur d'Assonvillers, she sent a message to the rue de Sèvres, asking if one of the Fathers could say Mass in the chapel the following morning. The Father Minister himself received the messenger and said, " I will send you someone whom you will like very much : do your best to keep him." The thought of having a regular chaplain seemed too good to be true, and the messenger was promptly sent back to verify the statement. Father Minister would not absolutely commit himself, but : " Tell your Reverend Mother that it is just as if I were sending her a regular chaplain," he said.

The following morning the little chapel was decorated in its best in honour of St. Gertrude, and when the new chaplain, Père Basuiau arrived, punctual to the minute, he was received by Mère de la Providence with every mark of respect, as befitted one sent by God.

He was indeed God-sent, we can say to-day, but none knew then to what extent he was to be God's messenger. His religious bearing and austere manner, added to his perfect recollection at the altar, filled the Community with respect and confidence.

After the Mass, when taking leave of Mère de la Providence, he said, with a smile of amusement : " Were you expecting a bishop ? " alluding to the festive appearance of the chapel, and the ceremonious reception by the Mother Superior. " Under the cir-

Rev. Père Basuiau, S.J.

cumstances even more than a bishop ; but is there any hope of you being able to come to us regularly ? ' she asked, with a note of intense anxiety in her voice. The Father replied that he would gladly come as long as his Superiors allowed it.

Thus, on St. Gertrude's day, Père Basuiau began his work for the Helpers of the Holy Souls, a work that lasted till his death, and indeed, beyond, for who can gauge the power and extent of a holy influence ? Père Basuiau had not hitherto won any renown as a preacher or director of souls. He would have called himself merely one of the rank and file of the Company of Jesus, not fitted for any great work. He was only a humble and single-hearted religious, but with all a Jesuit's chivalrous devotion to his Commander-in-Chief, under whose standard he would fight without heeding the wounds, if only he could gain souls for Christ.

For the first few weeks, Père Basuiau did nothing more than say Mass and hear confessions when the Abbé Gabriel was unable to come. But one morning he said to Mère de la Providence : " Will you allow me to make one small remark ? " " Oh, Father," she replied, " we are only children, we have everything to learn."

The Father's "small remark" was nothing worse than " You do not pronounce your Latin quite correctly in some of the prayers," and he proceeded to point out exactly where the accent should fall. Mère de la Providence was inwardly delighted at this mark of interest, " My position as Foundress," she remarked, " has prevented my learning a host of things which I

ought to know. I cannot tell you how grateful I shall be, Father, if you will undertake to teach me." Thus, a few instructions on the pronunciation of Latin led to other more interesting lessons, and before long Père Basuiau found himself in the unique position of Spiritual Director, not to say Master of Novices, to Mère de la Providence and her daughters. The Superiors of the Society of Jesus felt they could not interfere with what was so obviously the Divine Will, and Père Basuiau was allowed to undertake the spiritual direction of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, at any rate, for the time being.

On January 17, Monsieur d'Assonvillers arrived and Mère de la Providence felt instinctively that this sudden appearance portended no good, but she was scarcely prepared for the alarming news that her landlord was about to sell the house for 180,000 francs to a new purchaser. "But, Monsieur," she said very quietly, concealing her anxiety, "a man of honour always keeps his word, and you have promised in writing to give us the preference for 170,000 francs," and she produced the agreement which he had signed in November. The landlord talked and argued, and expostulated, but there was no getting away from that written pledge. The following day they met at the lawyer's office, and talked for another three-and-a-half hours, and on January 19 the title-deeds were actually signed, sealed and delivered over to the much-relieved Foundress. "You do indeed owe Our Lady a fine big candle," said the lawyer, who had watched over her interests in the kindest way.

Cardinal Morlot, Archbishop of Paris

Mère de la Providence was overwhelmed with delight and gratitude as she returned to the house which, after many vicissitudes, Providence had at last given her. She went at once to the chapel, and kneeling before the Tabernacle, "Dear Master," she cried, "You are no longer merely a tenant here, You are the owner." The entire Community then assembled in the chapel, where, in a blaze of candles, a fervent thanksgiving was offered to Our Lady of Providence. St. Joseph came in for his share of thanks, and after every clause in his Litany the Sisters responded "We thank you."

The purchase of the house marked a great step forward in the development of the Society, which was beginning to emerge from obscurity into the broad light of day. A sermon preached by Père Lavigne on All Souls' Day had brought a great concourse of visitors and, incidentally, we may add, produced a considerable increase in the precarious income. Some well-known Catholic journalists pleaded their cause, and the Emperor and Empress set the fashion by sending a substantial offering. These material matters were, however, of secondary importance to the holy Foundress compared to the spiritual welfare of her daughters and until she had made her perpetual Vows she felt that her Society was not on a real firm basis.

January 25 was one of her special days, surely her beloved Master would not deny her the happiness of making her Vows on that day? With her usual unconquerable confidence, she went to the Archbishop's house to obtain the necessary permission.

Several people were waiting for an audience with His Eminence Cardinal Morlot, but as soon as Mère de la Providence appeared, he dismissed everyone else, and inquired in the kindest manner about her work. She told him about the purchase of the house, and then continued : " Now that the Institute is established as far as temporal matters are concerned, I feel it is quite as necessary to strengthen it on the spiritual side, and I have come to ask your Eminence's permission to make my perpetual Vows, together with one of my daughters, although the Abbé Gabriel, our Superior, considers my request somewhat premature."

" Yes, I will grant you this grace," said the Cardinal at once. In spite of her emotion at this quick response, Mère de la Providence continued : " Our happiness would indeed be complete if Your Eminence would receive our Vows yourself ; and since your fatherly kindness encourages me I will even dare to implore your Eminence to perform the ceremony on the 25th of this month, a date which is particularly dear to me because of the Divine favours it recalls." " That is quite impossible," answered the Cardinal quickly, " I am engaged every day for the present." But His Eminence did not know with whom he was dealing, nor the spiritual resources of this " spoilt child " of Divine Providence.

" But Your Eminence *must* be free on that day," she cried confidently ; " as we had not the honour of being received earlier, we implored your Guardian Angel to keep that day free for us." The Cardinal thereupon consulted his book of engagements and

found to his astonishment that his Guardian Angel *had* kept that day free. So another item was added to the list of the Cardinal's engagements for that month.

Once more Mère de la Providence took her joyful news and her grateful heart to Our Lady of Victories, for it happened to be the second anniversary of that fateful day when she had begun a Novena to Our Lady, begging that she might die before the end of it, or be successful in mastering that impossible situation at the rue St. Martin. From there she went to see the Abbé Gabriel, and, kneeling down before him, said : " Father, do not be angry with me, His Eminence has granted my request, and will come himself to receive my vows on the 25th." " You spoilt child," was all the Father's comment, as he looked at her with an indulgent smile, and immediately began to arrange about the order of the ceremony.

A few days later, Mère de la Providence made a general confession of her whole life to Père Basuiau, and begged him to undertake the direction of her soul. At the same time he agreed to give the Community a little Triduum in preparation for the great ceremony. Some private notes written by the Foundress during these three days of quiet recollection, reveal the intense suffering that underlay her joyous exterior. She had looked forward so eagerly to this great event, why then should darkness descend on her soul ? why should she now shrink back in terror of the step she was about to take. Once again, the world and all its attractions came before her—every sort of alluring memory came back and urged her not to take this irrevocable step.

Nature rose up in revolt against the grace that was gradually transforming her soul. " I have promised Our Lord to ask of Him, death to self. Hitherto I have admired it very much, but have never asked for it, otherwise I should have obtained it, for, O my dear Jesus, You refuse me nothing." She did not realize that this very struggle was the proof that " self " was undergoing the process of annihilation.

But amidst all this tumult of feelings, when almost overwhelmed by her own utter helplessness, she knew that God was asking of her, not passive resignation, but a joyful acceptance of this spiritual darkness. " O my God, if I relied on myself, I should abandon all, for I feel incapable of anything," and then she remembered those great words of St. Paul that have brought strength to many a tempted soul. " I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me."

A meditation on Martha and Mary made a great impression on her. Had she not also been " busy about much serving." Perhaps that natural activity was the very thing that God was asking her to sacrifice. " That the soul may not serve God with a thing that can be taken from it, and that is finite : but with holy desire, which is infinite, through its union with the infinite desire of God."

Mère de la Providence had indeed taken a big step forward in the path of perfection when she wrote on the eve of her espousals : " To-day, O Lord, I make to Thee the sacrifice of the natural desire for active works which consumes me ; I will only do what Thou

Mère du Sacré-Cœur

dost allow through the advice of the spiritual guide Thou hast chosen for me."

It was the complete surrender of herself—the " giving all for all and asking nothing back."

Mère du Sacré Cœur was also preparing for that solemn act which would bind her for ever to her beloved Lord and Master. These two souls whom Divine Providence had united were indeed the complement of each other. Mère du Sacré Cœur loved to sit at Our Lord's Feet and listen to His Voice in a loving, intimate silence. Her life had been a lonely progress along a path beset with difficulties and disappointments. The bitter experiences of her youth had given a touch of austerity to her manner which differed so completely from that of her spiritual Mother. The energies of Mère du Sacré Cœur had all been turned inwards ; her whole will concentrated on union with Her Divine Lord, that she might communicate His Love to others, and so the formula of perpetual Vows was but the ratification of a pledge which she had already made irrevocably in her heart.

On January 25, just before eight o'clock in the morning, Cardinal Morlot arrived with his private secretary, and was received at the door by the Abbé Gabriel and Père Basuiau. The little chapel wore its most festive appearance. Close to the altar rails knelt Mère de la Providence and Mère du Sacré Cœur, who were making their perpetual Vows, also a sister who was to make her annual Vows. A little behind them knelt Madame Simart (Mère St. Pierre) and another postulant who were to receive the habit.

The Cardinal gave a fervent exhortation before they pronounced their Vows. The *Diarium* states that the singing was heavenly. Monsieur Guilhem, the friend of good and evil days, was present at the ceremony, and also kindly provided the breakfast for the Cardinal. Mgr. Morlot signed the register of the Vows, and so did all the clergy who had witnessed the ceremony. His Eminence granted forty days' Indulgence for every night spent with the sick poor, for every prayer to St. Joseph, and for all the charitable work done in the Convent for the poor. In the evening there was solemn Benediction.

Mère de la Providence passed the day in an ecstasy of happiness. " My perpetual Vows are pronounced," she wrote ; " O Jesus, You have contracted an eternal union with me, so unworthy! What took place within my soul I cannot express. O too short day ! Only in Heaven shall I find your like ! " These brief sentences reveal the measure and intensity of her happiness. Our Lord's promise to her had been fulfilled, almost to the letter; for had He not said two years before, " You will be a religious, but unlike any other. I will smooth out many a difficulty for you, but you will not be a perfect religious until you are thirty-three years of age."

On January 25, 1858, Mère de la Providence was within two months of her thirty-third birthday.

Chapter VII

RELIGIOUS FORMATION

PÈRE DE PONLEVOY once said, when speaking of the Foundress of the Helpers of the Holy Souls : " Nature and grace are both equally strong in this soul."

It was indeed true, as Père Basuiau knew well enough when he put her under strict obedience. Not that she had ever really failed to practise this virtue, which is the basis of religious life, but her spontaneous nature sometimes inclined her rather to seek approval for her actions than to submit them first to the authority of her Director.

Moreover, for the last two years she had been thrown so much on her own resources, that her natural self-reliance had been strengthened by habit, thus, in spite of her goodwill, she suffered at first intensely under the yoke of obedience. " You are breaking me, you are robbing me of all my initiative," she cried out. But her Director calmly replied : " Please God, it may be so, and that the spirit of Our Lord may take the place of your natural activity."

She was extremely sensitive to pain and her whole being quivered beneath this yoke, causing intense suffering which she bore with indomitable courage, and indeed the Holy Souls could hardly have permitted

it to be otherwise. " Everyone thinks I am in the seventh Heaven ! only God and you, Father, know how much I am suffering."

Ardent and spontaneous by nature, a religious before being a novice, a superior without ever having been in subjection, Mère de la Providence needed to check and calm that intense ardour, which she was the first to recognize and regret. Her eager enthusiasm never waned in spite of periods of deep depression when body and soul were well-nigh overwhelmed with anquish : " When they speak of my gaiety I seem to be acting a comedy," she said to herself. Truly she needed a helping hand, gentle yet firm, to be her support and guide. Père Basuiau was the very man for this great and noble work, and he became literally " Master of Novices " to the Foundress, who justly called the seven years she spent under his direction the " seven years of plenty."

A few notes left by Mère de la Providence help us to understand her character better, and also the direction of Père Basuiau.

" I complain that everything wearies me."

" You are not the only one," answered the Father.

" When I was grieving over my physical and mental sufferings to-day, before the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lord seemed to say : ' You hold your cross before your eyes, I bore it on My shoulders, and when lifted up upon it for *your* sake I did not come down. . . . You are constantly wishing to come down from your cross.' ' Yes, indeed, my Jesus, I ascended Calvary when founding this religious Order. . . . Thou didst

blindfold me when I left my home . . . . I hardly realized what I was doing, but I cast myself unconditionally into Thy merciful arms. On January 25, last year, when giving myself to Thee for ever, dear Jesus, it was with my whole heart that I said—I surrender myself. Thou hast indeed taken me at my word. Dear Master, grant that I may allow myself to be crucified.'

" Father, surely my state is not an ordinary one ? These struggles, these unceasing battles . . . although the constant cry of my heart in the midst of this turmoil is . . . nothing can rob me of the love of my God."

" My child, you are passing through a transition period . . . nature cannot be subdued in a day . . . the longer I live the more convinced I am of God's plans for you."

" What a night I have had ! After my Communion I begged Our Lord to give peace to my soul. . . . ' You shall have it, when you have ceased to crave for it,' He seemed to answer."

" My child, have you ever pondered on these words in the Gospel : ' Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die . . . ' I have been thinking you must be that grain of wheat well hidden in the earth, well ground that you may accomplish the work that God has given you to do." " Oh, Father ! I cannot !" " Well, well, leave yourself in the Hands of God, He will see to it."

" The Father forbids me to undertake certain works of mercy. . . ."

" But, Father, I am doing nothing at present."

" Purgatory must be your first consideration, formerly you were working for yourself, now you are working for Our Lord."

" How true it is ! I must put myself on one side. My nature is still too strong not to suffer from it. Last night I dreamt that Our Lord's three nails were piercing my heart through and through. The Father said that if that were true, St. Teresa herself would be jealous, but as it was only a dream I need not give it further consideration."

" The Father blessed some medals of Blessed Peter Claver and thought I had had them made. I expressed my astonishment that he should think me capable of acting without his permission. He replied that he considered me ' capable of anything . . . except doing good.' I took this statement quite seriously, and rejoiced over it the whole day. He added that I must learn how to say ' No,' and have the courage of my opinions, without always listening to the inclinations of my heart. . . ."

" The Father does not wish me to give alms. . . . Oh, my Lord, grant that I may obey always, although this seems very hard. I have only given eight francs the last four days." " That is quite enough for a fortnight," said my Director.

" But, Father ! St. Ignatius, whose life we are reading in the refectory, gave everything he had, and all he could beg, for his sick poor. Do let us do as he did."

" My child, he was a Saint."

" But, Father, you want us also to become saints."

" Yes, by obedience."

" Very well, we will do as you wish."

" Father, is it a temptation or a virtue to feel such profound disgust for the world ? " " My child, it is a grace for which you should thank God."

" I sometimes think that my inability to enjoy anything is merely the result of my suffering life."

" You are the spoilt child of Providence."

" Father, let me tell you something. To whom else could I say it, if not to you ? A feeling of such incredible weakness comes over me sometimes, I know not how to go forward, I have no wish to go back, and I realize the impossibility of remaining stationary, exactly like someone who has a long way to travel. I have gone a quarter of the distance and now find myself between two fires."

" My child, you know that in electricity the positive attracts the negative. . . . You are the negative, Our Lord the positive. . . . You must abandon yourself completely and say ' Fiat ' to all that grace asks of you."

" Father, I am worn out, every day I implore God to change His plans for me." " I have never suffered so much as I have since giving myself to Our Lord. I am like the old cab-horse who goes on trotting until he drops."

" You must always ' go on '."

" Hitherto, everything has been mere words with me (I mean up to the time of my arrival in Paris), ' The interior life,' ' sacrifices,' ' sufferings,' ' The Cross ' . . . appeared magnificent because they had not touched

me. Now I see that suffering is the manifestation of God's love and I understand.

" My child, when we love anyone very deeply we do not debate about it, but would willingly suffer martyrdom for the loved one's sake."

" I understand, Father, that Love then is stronger than suffering ; and that is just the Love I want to obtain from God."

" My child, suffering is the one great benefit which has never been taken from man. You must suffer for three ends. . . . To pay your own debts. . . . To attain unto sanctity . . . and as Foundress of a new Order."

" But how about the Holy Souls ? "

" They are closely bound up in these three ends."

" Father, if I were happy to suffer, it would no longer be a cross, but a foretaste of Heaven. When I kneel before the Tabernacle imploring Our Lord to change my state I seem unable to finish my request, and the words . . . ' Thy will be done ' rise to my lips instead."

" Always say that. . . . If Our Lord did, indeed, change your state, if you were morally contented with what you were doing, you would no longer suffer. If you were satisfied with yourself, I should be very sorry."

" I would much rather be good for Our Lord's sake than for my own."

Thus, little by little, suffering did its own inimitable work in the humble trusting soul of Mère Marie de la

Providence, suffering, first dreaded, then born with resignation and finally embraced with triumphant joy. Under the influence of this heroic suffering and of obedience in spite of nature's protest, Mère de la Providence grew daily calmer and stronger without losing any of her keen enthusiasm. When the call for action came, she could embrace it with the same generous ardour as before. Thus, slowly grace penetrated this rich nature, and those in whom she confided admired the marvellous workings of the Holy Spirit. Her progress was very real as Père Basuiau told her from time to time encouragingly.

In spite of ill-health, which no one ever suspected from her robust appearance, Mère de la Providence did not dispense herself from bodily penances, and alluded in her notes to an iron chain, and a discipline of cords. She tried to reduce her food to a minimum, until her Director insisted on her taking as much as was necessary for her constitution . . . according to the instructions given by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises.

Moreover, she strove for perfect self-control, repressing the first impulses of vivacity and the over affectionate emotions of her heart : " What a misfortune it is to have such a heart," she once said to Père Basuiau. But he corrected her with : " What happiness, my child, to consecrate that heart entirely to the love of Our Lord, and to sacrifice ! "

But while Père Basuiau was carefully training the souls of Mère de la Providence and her daughters, he did not lose sight of the practical needs of the new foundation. The question of a fixed rule had long

occupied the mind of the Foundress, and ever since the advent of a Jesuit director, the conviction had been steadily growing that the rule of St. Ignatius would exactly fulfil the ideal in her mind. Her early training at the Sacred Heart Convent, and her frequent intercourse with the Society of Jesus, had made her familiar with the spirit of the great Soldier-Saint. But would it be possible to adapt his rigorous Constitutions to the needs of a Community of women ? Père Basuiau set to work at once on the important task, and with infinite pains and earnest prayer he went through every item of his much-loved Rule, modifying and amending where positively necessary, but adhering closely to the spirit of his own great Founder.

The work was finished early in October just before the Community Retreat, which was to be given by the Abbé Gabriel. Mère de la Providence took the opportunity of formally presenting the new Constitutions to her Ecclesiastical Superior. The Abbé Gabriel had a great respect and admiration for the Jesuits, and was far too magnanimous to resent what might have been deemed an infringement of his prerogatives. On Monday, October 25, the Abbé Gabriel solemnly declared his approval of the Rule, before the assembled Community, saying : " My children, before the Tabernacle, in the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we adopt for our foundation the Rule of St. Ignatius, which has made so many saints. It is by no means easy; but at least it will help you to walk in the way of the Cross, the only path for the spouses of Our Lord."

The saintly Curé d'Ars had been watching every step in the development of the Institute, of which he may rightly be termed the co-Founder. For was it not his belief in her divine mission, and his never-failing encouragement, that had carried Eugénie Smet through all her difficulties ?

When the Abbé Toccanier told him that a Jesuit Father had undertaken the direction of the new Community, that the rule of St. Ignatius had been adopted, he rejoiced that the young Institute had matured in such a short time and that, instead of relying on itself, it was upheld by rules approved by Holy Church, and endowed with the experience of centuries. Full of holy joy, he exclaimed: "The dear children are safe at last ! "

Père Basuiau's work was by no means finished. It was necessary now for the nuns to learn the practice of these admirable Rules. He entered into the smallest details—vocal prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, examen, office, exterior works of charity, customs, feast days—the *Diarium* notes with care, all the directions that went to make up the family life of the Helpers of the Holy Souls. He presided over the first Council of the Society at which were present, with Mère de la Providence, Mère du Sacré Cœur, Mère de St. Joseph, Mère de la Misericorde, and the Mother Bursar. There were also frequent meetings where the explanation and application of the Rule were prepared. Once, when Mère du Sacré Cœur sat silent, too modest to hazard an opinion : " Have you nothing to suggest ? " he asked ; " No, Father," she

answered humbly. " That will not do," he said with a kind smile, " You must try."

Mère du Sacré Cœur was far from lacking in perception of the Rule, and gave her novices a sound religious formation under the guidance of Père Basuiau. She had indeed proved herself worthy to hold this most delicate and all-important position, which needed such gifts of heart, mind, and soul. Not only must she teach, but she must herself be the living example of all the religious virtues.

There was a constant coming and going in the Novitiate. Weak souls were soon weeded out, and we hear of eleven postulants leaving in the course of a few weeks. In spite of these defections, eight Novices gathered round their Mistress in March, 1858, six lay sisters, and two choir nuns : Mère St. Gertrude, and Mère St. Pierre, formerly Madame Simart, a young widow. Madame Simart had arrived in October with all her household goods. Mère de la Providence, who had refused Monsieur d'Assonviller's elegant furniture, looked askance at the sofas and chairs of various shapes and sizes, upholstered in pink damask. " Dear Mother, do you think I am really here at last ! " said the young widow, with a glance at the furniture. " I certainly think your furniture is here, but that can just as easily depart whence it came." said Mère de la Providence, with a twinkle in her eyes. Chairs were still scarce, and the sisters used the gay pink ones for the time being. Time passed, and the postulant became a novice. One day, when tempted to doubt her vocation, she looked at her

chairs and said : " If I go away, what will they sit on ? " The alternative was unthinkable. She stayed, and with her the furniture in question !

Mère du Sacré Cœur spared no pains in trying to instil into her novices some of her own profound appreciation of the Rule, and of the high perfection that underlay its apparent simplicity. Her instructions were full of the loftiest spirituality, mingled with sound common sense. " Generally speaking," she said, " we only become useful to our neighbour in proportion as we die to ourselves." And she would point out the futility of waiting for great occasions which so seldom occur, instead of making use of the hundred-and-one small opportunities that are of everyday occurrence, such as sitting up straight without leaning back in a chair ; practising perfectly all the rules of modesty ; taking care of the objects in daily use ; preferring always to have less rather than more ; taking up the least possible space—all this was more sanctifying in her opinion, and more helpful to the Holy Souls than were startling mortifications that appeal to the imagination, but are seldom practicable for long.

Above all self-imposed penances she loved those that come unsought. Any extremes of heat or cold were peculiarly trying to her constitution, but, instead of complaining, she would remark with a smile : " Let us make the most of it, dear Sisters, while it lasts. The Souls in Purgatory are relying on us." Indeed, those suffering souls were never long absent from her mind, as she saw in them, the primary object of the Institute,

the most efficacious means of developing the spirit of sacrifice.

She liked to see her novices fulfilling their duties quietly, without undue haste, which so often disturbs the serenity of one's soul, and interferes with others. "How can the Holy Spirit weave anything out of you, if you are always upsetting the loom? He will wait till you are calm again. Your haste only impedes His action, instead of helping it."

When an anxious novice once spoke of her fears for the future: "To-morrow belongs to God just as much as to-day," she said, "and Jesus will watch over you then as He does now." There was something peculiarly incongruous in a Helper of the Holy Souls worrying over the future, for had not the whole Institute been built up on blind trust in Providence—that Providence that had never yet failed to supply all its wants. "It is a great happiness," said the Mistress of Novices, "when a new sister comes to share our life. It is so wonderful how God always sends us gifts and offerings in proportion to our numbers and our needs. Since there have been twenty in the Community we have always had enough to keep us alive, as when there were ten." She knew that sadness is a hindrance to religious life, and she loved to be surrounded at recreation by a circle of frank, happy faces, and to watch the transformation that went on in these young souls as they yielded themselves more and more to the influence of Divine Grace.

Community life was not by any means comfortable in that overcrowded convent. Many of the sisters

slept in draughty corridors or damp attics, and those who considered themselves most privileged spent the night in the coach-house, for were they not nearer to Our Lord in His manger ? No privations could damp the ardour of these fervent young religious, whose generous hearts would have scorned to complain.

One of the novices, Sœur St. Pierre (Madame Simart) was given charge of a neglected green-house overgrown with ivy. She set to work cutting and pulling down the clinging festoons, her delicate hands carefully protected with gloves, but as the longing for sacrifice grew in her, she discarded the gloves and offered up many a scratch and torn finger-nail for the comfort of some soul suffering in Purgatory for inordinate vanity. Mère de la Providence used to watch operations, and encourage the zealous novice by "Sœur St. Pierre, I rely on you, you must be a Saint, and a canonized Saint, too." Poor Sœur St. Pierre could prune ivy with comparative ease, and sacrifice her pretty hands, but she could not learn a psalm by heart. Try as she would, after stammering out a few words, her voice would die away in hopeless confusion. Neither were her experiments in the kitchen very successful. One day when carrying a tureen of boiling soup she stumbled and spilt the entire contents over the floor, thus depriving her sisters of the chief item on their scanty menu. Needless to say, her Mistress of Novices did not repeat the experiment, although she watched with joy the steady growth in that interior spirit which was of supreme importance in her eyes.

Mère du Sacré Cœur well knew that prayer and

meditation were the chief means of developing this interior spirit. She taught them to know and love Our Lord, by profound meditation on His life. She once wrote to a possible aspirant : " I should like to see you with the Gospels always in your hands, so that without effort you may be so saturated with Jesus that your words, your looks, your whole behaviour, everything about you will reproduce Jesus."

This could never be accomplished by lightly passing over the surface of a subject, but only by a thorough study of every scene in the Gospel story that its deep, inner significance might sink into the soul and influence every word and deed and thought of the young religious, transforming her completely. The wise Mistress of Novices was too sensible however to insist on any hard and fast rules about so intimate and delicate a matter as prayer ; she wished her novices to be helped and not hindered by the different methods; they must always follow the attraction of grace: "Give your full attention to your meditation, and then let Almighty God do what He likes with you."

No faults nor frailties ever shocked this dear Mother, whose hand was always stretched out to help and support the weak. Her quiet strength and serene self-possession brought a sense of peace and security to the most troubled.

Sublime confidence in Our Blessed Lord seemed to radiate from her, and shed its soft beams on all who came under her influence. The one unpardonable offence was to doubt this loving Jesus, and the kind, gentle Mother could be pitiless towards that

discouragement which springs from injured pride.

"I am always coming back to my old principle," wrote Mère du Sacré Cœur, "one can do nothing except by Love . . . the frailties of others, my own weaknesses, all prove that the world can neither be regenerated nor even saved except by Love." These were not mere idle words, but the motive power of her whole life, and the secret of her influence over her novices, many of whom would undoubtedly have failed to persevere had it not been for her tender care.

One day, Mère du Sacré Cœur discovered one of her daughters in the linen cupboard busily putting away the household linen. As she caught side of her Mother, the unfortunate novice burst into tears, and with one hasty gesture she upset a pile of linen on to the floor. "Mother, I cannot stand it any longer, I am quite prepared to go away to-morrow, nothing will prevent me. I do not care what anyone thinks of me," and whilst pouring out her grievances she began picking up the linen that strewed the ground. Mère du Sacré Cœur, with a gentle look, answered, "Remember another time, dear child, that when you throw linen on the floor, you only have the trouble of picking it up again," and she stooped down and helped to collect the crumpled sheets and cloths. But her words were powerless to still the storm that was raging, so she wisely went away and resolved to watch developments and pray that grace might triumph over nature. The evening came, bringing no sign of returning peace, and Mère du Sacré Cœur retired to rest with a heavy

heart. That troubled face haunted her and made sleep impossible. She longed for an excuse to go and see her rebellious child. Presently, one of the shutters began to rattle in the wind, and she asked Mère de la Providence if she might fasten it. She then slipped quietly from the room and into the dormitory, where her storm-tossed novice was lying, wide awake. Stooping down, she kissed the burning forehead : " Dear child, please do not leave us, you would make me so unhappy " . . . and the gentle voice continued : " I wanted to come to you and made the excuse of a shutter rattling in the wind." These words went straight to the heart of the tempted novice and peace returned to her. She ever after attributed her perseverance to the wise and affectionate solicitude of her Mother Mistress.

Mère du Sacré Cœur was not entirely monopolized by her novices. Sometimes the professed were privileged to listen to her inspiring conferences. Her constantly recurring theme was self-conquest : the annihilation of that self which is the chief obstacle to sanctity. What is this " self " which must be destroyed ? It is the tendency to regard everything as it affects *me*, and which blinds me so much that it prevents me from knowing myself. I may well acknowledge that I am full of self-love, who would dare to deny it ? But I never recognize it when occasions arise. . . . I always mean well, no one knows what I am suffering, etc., etc., . . . Oh, how little do we know ourselves ! If we could but once in a while see ourselves as others see us !

"Abneget" means to deny ourselves. To deny a thing is as much as to say that it does not exist.—I must then behave as though I did not exist. Someone passes me by without a word of greeting ; if I were not there, I should not be in the least annoyed. . . . My advice is not heeded ; if I were not there I should not be hurt. When we are troubled and upset we may be sure that self-love is at the bottom of it, in some shape or form, because the Love of God brings peace. The great obstacle to perfection is my own self. I prevent myself from belonging entirely to Thee, O my God. Between Thee and me there is only myself . . . and yet I hesitate !

The annual retreat was always a great event in the life of the Community. Hitherto, the Abbé Gabriel had given the meditations, which were exclusively confined to the Four Last Things. These were undoubtedly very excellent subjects, but the new religious felt the need of something further, and they hungered for more nourishing food than the locusts and wild honey of this rugged St. John the Baptist, who was however, unconsciously preparing the way for the gentle Lamb of God and His message of loving kindness and tender mercy. Great was their joy when, in 1859, a Jesuit Father put before them the divine ideal, incarnate in Our Blessed Lord. The stirring appeal of the meditation on the Kingdom of Christ met with an enthusiastic response in these generous hearts, and, as they followed Him from Bethlehem to Calvary, and thence to the Hill of the Ascension, their enthusiasm increased more and more until it culminated in the

Contemplation for obtaining Divine Love, with its inevitable sequence—" Sume et Suscipe."

One and all, from the Mother Foundress to the humblest lay-postulant, felt that they had been given the nourishment for which they had hitherto vainly hungered. At last their souls could expand in the warm rays of Divine Love, and they could yield themselves to the joy of a complete surrender to this " tremendous Lover."

These early years of the Institute were indeed rich in blessings and characterized by an enthusiasm, a calm cheerful courage, a whole-hearted zeal for God's honour for which the Helpers of the Holy Souls have ever since been distinguished. And though we know that Almighty God is the Giver of all good gifts, yet may we not trace these characteristics to the spirit of the venerated Foundress and to the teaching given by the first Mistress of Novices whose wisdom and sympathy won the confidence of all those under her care? God's grace and her own loving heart gave her unerring judgment in dealing with the complexities of the human soul.

Who will not appreciate the subtle analysis of these words of counsel which might have come from the pen of St. Catherine of Siena herself. " The wanderings of your imagination trouble you because you feel they distract you from your duties, but, nevertheless, you find them attractive. You are afraid of the precipice, but you love the flowers growing on the edge. You find it easier to bemoan your misdoings than to impose on yourself the necessary restraint in order to do better."

Very searching too, are her six proofs of purity of intention :

(1) To do what God wills, i.e., to be obedient.
(2) When He wills : to be punctual.
(3) To prefer to be hidden and unknown.
(4) To go on with the same zeal after but a moderate success.
(5) To go on contrary to one's inclinations for the sake of the common weal.
(6) To expect no gratitude from anyone after having done one's best.

Little humble things that the world treats with contempt ! But true sanctity does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but rather in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

Chapter VIII

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIETY

ANYONE walking down the rue de la Barouillère in 1858, and looking at the grey walls and stiff rows of windows of No. 16 would see no change in the outward appearance of the house since the days when Monsieur d'Assonvillers held his fashionable receptions there. But if he stepped inside, what a difference he would find. The largest reception room in the house had been given to Our Blessed Lord, whose Divine Presence permeated the whole place. So, in like manner, the inmates of the house remained outwardly the same, but inwardly a transformation was taking place, for was not the Divine Master dwelling there as King and leading them in the path of sanctity? Under the influence of Mère de la Providence and Mère du Sacré Cœur, the young religious were learning every day more of that confidence and love of which the two Mothers were living emblems. That intimate personal love of Our Divine Saviour, which is the strength of all true religious, kindled in them a great longing to go out and help the poor and suffering. Hardly were they installed in their new home, when they were summoned to the bedside of a dying woman. The tenderness with which they nursed the poor diseased body brought healing to the soul and led to many

other similar calls where the nuns were able to expend their holy zeal. The Archbishop and many parish priests would send their most distressing cases to Mère de la Providence, knowing that the poor and outcast and suffering would be sure of loving care for the Master's sake. Many lost sheep were thus brought back to the fold, marriages were made regular, baptisms and first communions were arranged, and catechism taught. "The devotion of your daughters is sublime," said a priest whose flock had reaped the benefits of this apostolic devotion. The work they made more particularly their own was that of nursing the sick poor in their own homes, helping the dying through the last painful stages of their earthly journey, comforting the bereaved, and laying out the dead.

In the first nineteen months these zealous women had visited and nursed 129 sick in their own squalid homes, 64 of whom had recovered ; 52 conversions were recorded, and of the 48 death beds that had been attended, 40 burials had been paid for by them.

The problem of how to keep in touch with their protégées was solved by weekly meetings at the rue de la Barouillère, which were soon well attended and productive of good results.

Her zeal for the poor outcast did not blind Mère de la Providence to the needs of those who enjoyed greater worldly advantages, and whose souls are often more starved than those of their humbler brethren. By this time, the little Society was beginning to be well known, and numerous visitors came to the house,

begging prayers for the soul of some beloved relation or friend. The warm welcome, the ready sympathy, the cheerful spirit of the Convent invariably led to further visits, and as this circle of friends increased, Mère de la Providence conceived the idea of forming them into an Association or a Third Order. Thus, many women living in the world, and bound by social and family ties, could satisfy their desire for a more perfect life by sharing in the prayers and in the charitable works of the Community.

The idea was warmly welcomed, and many Associates met together on Mondays under the direction of Mère St. Pierre. By March, 1859, there were twenty-eight Associates who had all gone through the necessary probation and were looking forward to the day of solemn consecration. The Cardinal Archbishop came himself and blessed the silver crosses inscribed with the familiar motto, "Pray, Suffer, Labour for the Souls in Purgatory," which each member received after she had read aloud her solemn Act of Consecration.

The Association took immediate root and has continued to flourish wherever the Helpers of the Holy Souls have founded a house. It now numbers many thousands of devoted women, who find their joy and comfort in this consecration, for they become in a very real sense, members of a religious family, and gain many privileges for their own beloved dead, as well as for their own souls when they in their turn cross the threshold of Eternity. In 1860, Mère de la Providence obtained from the Holy Father a plenary

indulgence, applicable to the souls in Purgatory, for each honorary member.

(1) On the day of her admission to the Association.

(2) On the Feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Annunciation, All Souls, St. Joseph, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and St. Gertrude.

(3) At the hour of death, if with true contrition, they repeat either aloud, or in secret, the invocation : " My Jesus, mercy."

But this expenditure of zeal on outward works of charity never tempted Mère de la Providence to neglect that interior sanctification which must be the foundation of all work for souls. Under her watchful supervision, and inspired by her noble example, the Community was developing rapidly and on very definite lines.

The saintly Curé d'Ars had been watching its development with the keenest interest. His prayers, his encouragement, and his firm conviction in her divinely appointed mission, had helped Mère de la Providence through all her difficulties. Many a time had she longed for a personal interview with this holy friend. Had she consulted her own wishes, she would have lost no time in going on this pilgrimage, but having bound herself to obey, she would not stir without the consent of her Ecclesiastical Superior. Before giving his consent the Abbé Gabriel was determined to find out for himself whether or not the reports of the Curé's sanctity had been exaggerated. Accordingly, he went to Ars in 1858 and made a retreat under the saintly Curé, whom he soon recognized as one of

God's chosen servants, inspired by the Holy Ghost. In the course of their lengthy conversations the name of Mère Marie de la Providence was constantly recurring. "When are you going to send her here?" asked the Curé, "I would rather see her than any princess." The Abbé Gabriel arranged that the visit should take place the following year.

On New Year's Day, 1859, the Community had the great joy of a surprise visit from the Abbé Toccanier, who had come to Paris for a few days. After saying his Mass in the little chapel, he spoke to the assembled Community about his venerated Curé, and of the many wonders that were of almost daily occurrence. He expatiated on the Curé's keen interest in the Society, and how every fresh development filled his soul with joy. A picture of Our Blessed Lady in a silver frame delighted all their hearts, for it was a personal gift to their Foundress. The humble Curé might not have been quite pleased had he known that the Abbé Toccanier had possessed himself of a handkerchief which he presented to Mère de la Providence, as a precious relic of one who would probably one day be raised to the altars. Once again Mère de la Providence was entreated to come herself to Ars, and satisfy the Curé's longing for a personal interview. Nothing would give her greater satisfaction, she declared, if only her director would consent. However, she was just making her own "Novitiate," and undergoing a course of rigorous discipline, so when Père Basuiau, her director, was approached on the subject, he quietly remarked that

the desire to satisfy a personal devotion was not a sufficiently strong motive for the Mother General to leave her Community, and make a pilgrimage to Ars. In these days of quick travelling, this decision sounds unnecessarily harsh ; if the Father had known that in a few months the interview would no longer be possible, he might have relented.

Mère de la Providence bore the disappointment with her accustomed fortitude. The spirit of sacrifice was growing every day in her heart, and her oft-repeated " Fiat " had developed a calm strength and peace. She had promised obedience to her spiritual director, and it was not for her to complain if her own wishes were thwarted.

There was indeed much to occupy her time, for though the Society had already taken its own distinctive form there were still many details to be settled, ere it could claim to have reached maturity.

On February 2, 1859, the renovation of vows was made as in the Society of Jesus. The Fathers at the rue de Sèvres were always ready with their help and advice. Father Provincial himself gave them an instruction and Benediction on St. Joseph's day, and Père de Ponlevoy was a frequent visitor. Moreover, it was arranged that Père Felix should make an appeal for the new Society, and that all the collections should be for the benefit of the Community.

On May 2, in spite of threatening thunder-clouds, a whole line of carriages was drawn up in the rue de Sèvres outside the Jesuit Church which was packed to overflowing. Père Felix's sermon was a very great

success. Whilst the congregation listened spellbound to his vivid description of Purgatory, the Church grew darker and darker. Just as the preacher cried out : " Do you know what these souls are suffering ? Fire, fire, fire," a vivid flash of lightning lit up the whole building, followed by a deafening crash of thunder. The preacher's eloquence, made still more impressive by this startling accompaniment, affected his hearers to such an extent that the collection boxes were soon overflowing with a torrent of coins. Rich and poor alike put their offerings into the boxes, handed round by eight of the Associates, who hurried back to the convent to tell Mother General the happy news. One poor woman, who had come to church without her purse, went later to the door of the Presbytery and timidly offered two francs : " For the Superior of the work for Purgatory," she said. " I have many relations for whom the religious are praying without knowing it." This " widow's mite " was placed by the holy Foundress at the feet of Our Lady of Providence. The famous sermon was afterwards printed and sold for the benefit of the Society, thus helping to make the work better known and appreciated.

A few days later the Community took possession of the right wing of the house, and moved what could be spared of the none-too-plentiful furniture, but Providence, in the shape of Monsieur Guilhem, sent a substantial offering to defray the cost of furnishing the extra rooms. Divine Providence had indeed never failed to send useful friends and benefactors when needed. One after another had come forward, done

their work, and withdrawn, to be replaced by others. Thus Père Aussant, Mgr. Sibour, the Abbé Largentier had all had their share in the foundation. Madame Jurien who had played such an important part in its early days, continued to take a great interest in the Society from afar, and frequent letters passed between her and her "dear daughter, Eugénie." Soon after the purchase of the right wing, the Vicomtesse returned to Paris and at once made herself completely at home at the Convent which partly owed its existence to her generosity. One morning, she could not make up her mind where to hear Mass. "Go and hear it in Purgatory," a voice whispered. So off she went to the rue de la Barouillère. It was a hot morning, the windows of the chapel were wide open, and she could see the nuns assembled there for Mass ; why disturb them by ringing the front door bell ? The Community, accustomed as they were to Madame Jurien's unconventional ways, must have looked with amused astonishment as she climbed in at the open window, and immediately settled down to her prayers, as though it were the most natural thing in the world for an elderly countess to make this somewhat unusual entrance.

As the summer wore on, the accounts from Ars became more and more alarming, and Mère de la Providence knew that the longed-for meeting would never take place in this world. Early in August the saintly Curé was called to his eternal reward. "Dear Jesus, what a sacrifice you have asked of me, by the death of the Curé d'Ars, without my ever having had

the happiness of seeing him, and of receiving his precious blessing, ' Thy Will be done.' " And then with characteristic generosity, she cried : " My God, I offer Thee this sacrifice for the Souls in Purgatory."

Some few years before, when the blessed Curé had heard of the assassination of Mgr. Sibour : " This death has robbed you of an earthly protector," he wrote, " but it gives you a more powerful one in heaven." With even greater truth could these words be applied now when this cherished friend had gone to his Father's House. Never once had he swerved in his conviction that Eugénie Smet was the instrument chosen by God to found this new religious Society. In all justice may his name be for ever linked with that of Mère Marie de la Providence as a co-founder of the " Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls," who ever continue to evoke his help and rely on his protection. He who prophesied the rapid growth of this new religious Society would surely see that his words be fulfilled. When the relics of the Venerable John Marie Vianney were distributed, the Helpers of the Holy Souls came in for a large share—various articles of clothing, the rochet he wore in his confessional, a piece of burnt bed-curtain, a lock of hair, and a phial full of his blood which remained red and liquid, much to the astonishment of a Protestant doctor who testified to the fact, whilst admitting that he could find no scientific explanation for it.

Mère de la Providence lost no time in imploring the saintly Curé's intercession for an intention very near

to her heart—the vocation of her sister Emma. The happy, high-spirited girl, with her fund of humour, and her amusing ways, was the pet of the household, and brought sunshine wherever she went. She had been through all those dreary days in the rue St. Martin, and yet she could not make up her mind to take herself and her vocation seriously. As a matter of fact much as she loved her sister and her Community there was a strong counter-attraction at Loos, in the shape of some little fair-haired nephews and nieces who occupied a large share of Emma's heart. In August, 1859, Mère de la Providence wrote to Madame Smet : " Many thanks, dearest Mother, for your charming note which I am as usual answering by return. Emma's vocation is more than doubtful. She pursues it, and then runs away as soon as she seems within reach of it. Your consent impressed her more than anything, and yet she sang in every key, 'I have no vocation.' Indeed, at the present moment, I cannot help laughing over our Emma's vocation, for Mère de la Providence becomes once more Eugénie Smet when listening to the merry jests of this most amusing Emma." But this " amusing Emma " continued to flit between Paris and Loos, and it was not for another two years that the call of the Divine Master became too insistent to be ignored.

In the meantime, the scarcity of vocations must have caused the holy Foundress some anxiety, although she was too wise to think that the mere increase in numbers was any sign of true prosperity. It was, moreover,

essential in these early days to have picked subjects, foundation-stones that would bear the weight of a noble edifice. During the first two years at the rue de la Barouillère, six lay sisters had joined the Community, but not one choir postulant had persevered. The year 1860 was, however, fruitful in many excellent vocations. These additions to the already overcrowded Community naturally exercised the mind of the Foundress, and when she heard that the house next door, No. 14, was for sale, she at once made an offer for it. The landlord was determined to drive a good bargain and asked an exorbitant price for the property. Mère de la Providence firmly declined to give more than a reasonable sum. At the time she had no money, but as the house was obviously essential to the development of the Congregation, she trusted blindly to her beloved Providence and to St. Joseph. Even when she heard that the house was about to be transformed into a factory, her confidence never failed, although the noise of the machinery and the close proximity of eighty workmen would have made Community life well-nigh unendurable. St. Joseph was besieged with prayers and promises. If only the dividing wall between the two houses were ever broken down, his statue should be the first put through the breach. Needless to say, St. Joseph responded fully to the trust placed in him. The grasping landlord relented and the deed of purchase was duly signed, much to the vexation of his wife, who wept bitterly over her husband's unaccountable weakness. Two days later, a statue of St. Joseph arrived unexpectedly, as though he were for once in a

hurry to claim the fulfilment of the contract. But it was not till the following June that an opening was made between the two houses, and the statue of St. Joseph installed in a niche above.

The holy Foundress must have had much consolation as she watched the progress of her Society. The Novitiate was now well filled with very promising subjects, but she still longed to see her sister Emma's laughing face framed in the austere black bonnet of the order. Many were the prayers offered up for the wilful girl. However, she came to Paris in July, determined to treat the matter of her vocation seriously, and to make a retreat with the object of discerning God's will for her. Accordingly, she retired into solitude for eight days while Père Basuiau put her through those Exercises which have been the turning-point of so many lives. Mère de la Providence watched and prayed, but refrained from any intercourse with her sister, lest she should interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit. Before the eight days were over, Père Basuiau came to the Mother Foundress, " It is all settled," he said, with a look that filled the Mother's heart with joy, for she knew that Emma had responded to the Master's invitation ; but the joy was mingled with pain. How could this pet of the household face the harsh trials and privations of a struggling Community, where poverty, with its accompanying discomforts, was a stern reality. She had indeed shared in these trials at the rue St. Martin, but there was always the comfortable home at Loos in the background if Community life became too

irksome. It was a very different matter to bind herself for life.

" Father," said Mère de la Providence, " you have no idea what this vocation of Emma's has cost me in struggles, sufferings, interior anguish, and crosses. Oh, I do pray she may never encounter such trials ! " " If Almighty God wills to sanctify her she will certainly meet them," answered Père Basuiau.

All this time the professed and novices had lived together, sharing meals and recreations, and even when No. 14 had been bought the novices continued to share in the general life of the Community. In September, 1861, an important change was made when Père Basuiau decreed that the novices be separated from the rest of the Community. Although it was only a question of moving next door, it was a distinct breaking up of the family circle, and the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the Society. " The Father tells me that the sacrifice will be, for my motherly heart, like that of a mother who separates from her children so that they may be better brought up," wrote the Mother Foundress, whose capacity for loving and suffering seemed to increase rather than diminish. The very thought of sacrifice always acted as an incentive, and her ready " Fiat " sweetened the bitterest chalice.

On September 29 the " Status " was solemnly read in the refectory, and each religious was given her charges for the next year and her appointed house. As they filed out of the refectory into the Community room, many of the sisters might have been caught surreptitiously wiping tears from their eyes, for this

was the last recreation they would have all together.

Henceforth the professed nuns continued their apostolic labours, while the novices were being trained in holy solitude under the care of Mère du Sacré Cœur. In November, Emma Smet entered the Novitiate, as postulant.

The Mistress of Novices had need of a special grace to fulfil her difficult task of training these souls placed under her care. A novice, whose exemplary life later on was a source of edification, never forgot one most salutary reproof. She was constantly regretting the many little comforts and luxuries of her former life, and did not at all relish the privations and discomforts of holy poverty. She had, indeed, made a generous sacrifice in leaving the world, but was it necessary to have quite such a poor, miserable, bare cell? The Mistress of Novices confided the trouble to Mère de la Providence, who took the matter in hand with characteristic energy. A carpet was taken from the chapel, a comfortable arm-chair and an elegant table were collected from elsewhere, and the postulant, arrayed in a fashionable gown of pale blue silk, was begged to rest all day, and not trouble about any religious duties. This wholesome and judicious reproof had the desired effect, and the contrite postulant begged to be allowed to strip her room of these unnecessary luxuries, and make it once more the poor cell so beloved by every true Helper of the Holy Souls.

On January 31, Mgr. Morlot gave permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the oratory of the

Novitiate as soon as an altar had been installed, and two days later the Community assembled in the chapel for a little ceremony that must have touched every heart very closely, for on February 2, Emma Smet became Sister Mary of St. Ignatius, and was clothed in the habit of the Order. It has been asserted that the Helpers of the Holy Souls have no habit, and although this statement is not strictly correct, it must be admitted that the sombre black bonnet and cape make no strong appeal to the imagination. The ceremony of Clothing is as simple and unpretentious as the habit itself, and takes place in the presence of the religious family alone. No change has been made in the ceremony since the day when Emma Smet asked permission to enter the Novitiate and as the Mother Foundress looked tenderly at this beloved sister whom she had so long desired to call her daughter, we can hear now the ring of her sweet voice, trembling, perhaps, with emotion, as she said to the young novice :

" Dearest child, we wish it were possible to express our heartfelt joy in admitting you to the Community. From the beginning of the Foundation you have shared our anxieties ; ever since you have remained united to us in heart. Oh, dear child, all those little by-paths have led you to the royal way of the Cross. You know the kind Father, chosen by God to point out the way to you. Obedience and self-sacrifice—such must be your religious life from this first step to the very last, with the help of divine grace. We love to think that such are your dispositions on this occasion, for which I have so greatly longed. Yes, I have,

indeed, longed to see you one of us, called by the sweet name of sister, by those whom God has given me for daughters and sisters. Your black dress will remind you every day that you are dead to the world and to everything that is not pleasing to God. Each morning as you put it on you will kiss it respectfully because it is the livery of Jesus who marks you with the seal of the Cross. Your name will not come as a surprise, for the Père Gabriel and Père Basuiau have already given it to you. As for me, I can but repeat with those whom Our Lord has given us for Superior and for Father : yes, you shall henceforth be called Mary of St. Ignatius. 'Noblesse oblige': this name will impel you to seek always the greater glory of God. Protected by the illustrious Founder of the Society of Jesus, you will implore his powerful protection for the little Society which you adopt this day. You will love St. Ignatius because he wanted nothing but the dear Master's love and grace, and also because, already protector of our family in the world, he has chosen to become the father of your soul. You know whether or not you owe the grace of your vocation to him, after Our Lord Jesus Christ. Magnificat."

On June 14, 1860, the Very Rev. Father Beckx had written to the Foundress : "Devotion to the Holy Souls has always been dear to our Society and one of my predecessors, Père Lainez, who succeeded St. Ignatius, specially recommended it to us, as completing the end for which our Society was instituted by St. Ignatius, i.e., *Ad majorem Dei Gloriam*. Therefore, I felt inclined at once to agree to your request, and to

apply 500 of the Masses which I have at my disposal for the relief of the Holy Souls.

"I beseech our divine Master to continue to pour out His blessings on you, Reverend Mother General, and on all the fervent souls who have joined you in the holy work which you have undertaken.

"I remain,

"Your very humble servant in Christ,

PIERRE BECKX,

"*General of the Society of Jesus.*"

The Rev. Father Provincial asked for a copy of this letter, which was placed in the archives of the Jesuit Church in the rue de Sèvres. There was, indeed, constant intercourse between the rue de Sèvres and the rue de la Barouillère. Père de Ponlevoy was a frequent visitor, although on one occasion he excused himself on the plea of having to attend to some poor sinners: "Hell being more pressing than Purgatory."

When asked by the Superior of the Jesuits at Liège to give his opinion of the young Institute: "I am only passing through Paris on my way to the south of France," wrote Père de Ponlevoy, "but I have time to give you an excellent account of this new religious family. I know them very well indeed, we give them frequent instructions, their rules are formed on ours, their spirit is good, and their works both useful and numerous."

Père Foucault, Master of Novices at Angers, willingly supplied information and explanations as to the

religious formation of his novices, who all wished to be enrolled as honorary members of the Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, begging that their diploma might date from June 1, the feast that year of Our Lady Help of Christians, as well as the first day of the month of the Sacred Heart.

Père Longhaye, who had followed his son into the Society of Jesus, was ordained in the chapel of the rue de la Barouillère by Mgr. Chalandon. Père Blot, after dedicating his book *In Heaven we know our own* to Mère de la Providence, suggested writing a short account of the Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls.

But the greatest proof of esteem was the number of excellent recruits whom the Jesuit Fathers sent to try their vocation in the new Community.

Although so many of the Jesuit Fathers befriended the young Community, it was Père Basuiau who remained the great benefactor, not only in the energetic way with which he led the Mother Foundress and her daughters along the path of perfection, but also in his practical help in the development of the Society as a whole.

March 25 had always been a special feast as the Mother Foundress was born on the Feast of the Annunciation. The Community generally made some loving offering to their Mother to mark the occasion, but in 1862 Père Basuiau said that the day was to be celebrated in Jesuit fashion, that is, without any birthday presents. The Father forbore to mention that for some weeks past, he himself had been preparing a present which he

knew would give untold satisfaction to the venerated Foundress.

On March 25 he came to offer her his congratulations and placed in her hands the result of his work on the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus which he had adapted to the Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls.

" My surprise was complete," wrote Mère de la Providence, " the Father could not have given me greater pleasure. My dear Master, I beseech Thee to reward him with countless blessings, for thus stooping to help me in my weakess."

Together with the Constitutions, Père Basuiau had also taken from the Jesuit *Day Book* all that could be adapted to the mode of life of the Helpers of the Holy Souls.

As Almighty God sent new and influential friends to help Mère de la Providence in her great work, so the benefactors of early years disappeared from the scene. Madame Jurien, who had played such an important part in the new foundation, suddenly left Paris without saying a word to her " spiritual daughter," and it was only when the news reached the rue de la Barouillère that the Vicomtesse's furniture had been sold and her servants dismissed, that the Community realized that this was a definite departure.

In the beginning of July a letter arrived proving that Madame Jurien was still the staunch friend of yore, whose confidence in Divine Providence never wavered,

although the failure of the crops on her estate had well-nigh ruined her financially. On September 17 she wrote again : " My dear daughter—your letter explaining the reason for your long silence, has been a great consolation to me : you did not know of my departure for Bourbon and all the sacrifices which the dear Master has demanded of his little hand-maiden," and she goes on to complain of her loneliness : " I have no spiritual help whatever, nothing but the bare necessaries of life, confession and absolution. . . . I no longer have a Father to whom I can open my heart, no one gives me a word of comfort or encouragement. Indeed, the remembrance of all that sweet consolation has almost faded from my mind. No more milk for me ! Nothing but dry bones and hard meat are my daily portion. I sometimes think that the devil has been asking the dear Master to sift me like the unfortunate Job, but, not having his patience, I sometimes sink so deep into the abyss that I hardly know how to climb up again."

" I suffer for the one whom God has confided to my care, and whom you know well," she wrote, alluding, of course, to her " spiritual daughter." " Sometimes it seems as if I no longer believe in anything at all, even the sweet consolations which Our Lord formerly vouchsafed to me seem to be mere illusions. In other words, I become identified with that soul in all her many and sore trials."

The Vicomtesse was delighted to hear that the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the chapel of St. Joseph, and offered to pay for the altar. Her letter

ends with some words of advice, straight from her generous heart :

> " Never refuse a daughter because she has no dowry, my dear child : as long as Our Lord Himself remains your inheritance, what need you fear ? But, you ask, suppose the inheritance does not cover the debts which you have incurred trusting to Providence ? Fear nothing save lack of faith."

In October, 1862, the Mother General heard that the small community in the rue de la Barouillère had been inserted in the Archbishop's brief. The letter telling her the welcome news was written by the Abbé Lagarde, who concluded thus : " His Eminence loves your Institute, the excellent spirit that animates it, and all the hidden good it accomplishes." And when Mgr. Chalandon wrote to congratulate her, he remarked : " Providence always spoils you, and these favours make it well worth your while to accept bravely the precious trials that come to you with God's permission. They are precious, because they will gain you most merit in heaven. It is a great happiness to me to have been able to contribute in a small way to the favours which the Archbishop has granted you."

Cardinal Morlot had indeed proved himself the kindest of fathers, and had never refused anything to the Community. It was, therefore, a great grief when, on December 29, 1862, His Eminence was called to his eternal reward. " Day and night I am

thinking of Cardinal Morlot," wrote the Mother Foundress, "may God reward him for all he has done for us."

So instead of Cardinal Morlot, it was Cardinal Donnet who came to the rue de la Barouillère on January 25, to receive the perpetual vows of Mère de l'Immaculée Conception and Mère de la Miséricorde. Several priests were in the Sanctuary : the Abbé Gabriel, the Abbé Toccanier, who recalled the memory of the saintly Curé d'Ars, whilst three Jesuit Fathers, including the Provincial and Père Basuiau, demonstrated by their presence their interest in the Society.

The little Society was rapidly developing with all the vigour of youth ; it could now boast of many fervent members, of perpetual vows, and constitutions of its own, and on February 8 Mère de la Providence announced that a further spiritual privilege pertaining to the rule of St. Ignatius would henceforth be added to those already enjoyed in the Society, namely, a third year of probation, to which members of the Society are admitted just prior to making their Final Profession and which serves as a preparation to that great act. Mère du Sacré-Cœur would give up her post of Mistress of Novices and become Directress of the exercises of the Third Year.

Mère St. Pierre was one of the first group of Tertiaries. In the notes written by her during this period we recognize the virile teaching of Mère du Sacré Cœur. The pupil had not yet attained to the calm, cool judgment of the Mistress, although she sometimes tried to reason about her vocation with a mathematical precision, worthy, she thought, of a

disciple of St. Ignatius : " Since religious life is the ideal life for a human being, as the nearest approach to the life of God Incarnate, therefore the repugnance which I feel for it, proves conclusively the perversity of my will, led astray by the world, the flesh, and the devil ; that is why I want to make my perpetual vows which will put me out of the reach of my enemies, through the all-powerful grace which God has promised to those who follow Him. And whilst pronouncing the formula of my sacred contract before the Blessed Sacrament, I will entreat my Guardian Angel to voice the feelings of my heart."

But this calm reasoning could not really satisfy her generous heart and she was soon pouring out burning words of love, unchecked, we may be sure, by Mère du Sacré Cœur, who was true to her principle : " One can do nothing except by love."

Thus did Mère St. Pierre and her Sisters of the Third Year make rapid progress along the path of perfection, and if a little self-love had brought them to the entrance, nothing but the pure love of Jesus could have carried them so joyfully through the countless trials and mortifications of their austere life. When in the course of her long retreat, Mère St. Pierre was meditating on her beloved Saviour's road to Calvary, she cried out : " With His Heart overwhelmed with sorrow, Jesus goes from Bethany to Jerusalem, from the city of obedience to the city of crucifixion and peace. St. Ignatius says : ' Our Lord goes to His Passion ' ; that expression vibrates in my heart. For seven years I have been strongly drawn to the Passion ;

to-day, O my God, I also can say in all truth, I am going to my Passion. I have no sweet feelings of devotion, my whole being recoils from the sacrifice, but I am going to my Passion to accomplish Thy Will. I will glorify Thee to atone for my sins, to save my brethren, to comfort the souls in Purgatory. This retreat was necessary to make me realize their sufferings. My own intense anguish has made me understand theirs, and made me long to help them. . . . My very body is worn with suffering, but, at any rate, to-day I will hide my wounds in Our Lord's Wounds, and drown my own grief in the infinite griefs of His Sacred Heart."

Mère St. Pierre knew that when the retreat was over, and she returned to her daily life, the old temptations would arise again, and to safeguard herself against any possible yielding, she wrote on January 18, 1865, these characteristic words : " I am writing these words to bear witness against myself, the world, and the devil in those temptations which I know will come, and over which I will triumph by the grace of God, Who is so faithful." She then proceeds calmly and deliberately to write her resolution : " Whenever my religious life seems like a painful Calvary, when I feel a repugnance to everything, when all my senses, my mind, and my heart are rebelling against the sacrifice, I am fully determined with the help of Divine Grace, to bind myself anew to Our Lord Jesus Christ, by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the complete abandonment of all my merits to the Holy Souls. This determination is the fruit of the graces which God has vouchsafed me in this retreat. His Divine

Truth itself has deigned to enlighten me, and all creatures, all human understanding, all my former desires sink into oblivion. . . . I am nailing myself to the Cross, so that I may never more come down from it, however strong the temptation may be."

Her Divine Lover took her at her word, and instead of flooding her soul with sweet consolation, He allowed it to be plunged into darkness, so that with an aching heart and a body racked with neuralgia, the victim was ready for the sacrifice, and, rising to the height of her sublime vocation, she wrote, January 25: "At last I have made my vows, without any spiritual consolation other than a calm, peaceful joy in the Holy Spirit. . . . My vows are the outcome of the trials that have gone before, and prepare the way for those to follow. . . . May Our Lord be praised for all the past, and help me in the future. Amen. Alleluia."

On the day when Mère St. Pierre bound herself for ever to follow Jesus in the Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, the Abbé Gabriel came to receive her vows and speak a few fatherly words of congratulation, but when the Community gathered round the newly professed Mother to welcome her back after her year's seclusion, her beloved Mère du Sacré Cœur was no longer there. She had been sent as Superior to the new foundation at Nantes.

St. Sebastian, Spain

Chapel, Nantes

Chapter IX

"NANTES": THE FIRST FOUNDATION

TOWARDS the end of March, Mère de la Providence wrote in her Diary: "To-day I have been asked to found a house at Nantes. Is it a stroke of Divine Providence?" The first idea of this foundation had come to Mademoiselle Josephine Terrien de la Haye, living at Nantes, and when she heard that her uncle, Monsieur Angebault, was going to Paris, she begged him to call at the rue de la Barouillère, and discuss the suggestion with the Mother Foundress.

Accordingly, on March 30, Monsieur Angebault called at the Convent and asked the Reverend Mother on what conditions she would undertake a foundation at Nantes. "The first condition is that God *will* it, to be manifested to us by the *will* of the Bishop," said Mère de la Providence. "Up to the present I see only your niece's *will* in this matter. After that, a house must be given us and sufficient means to support the few sisters who would be sent to the foundation."

Monsieur Angebault thanked her and promised not to let the matter rest. Mère de la Providence instinctively shrank from the proposal, but felt in her heart that it could not be ignored. Père Basuiau had no hesitation in declaring that the suggestion came from

God, and was willing with his Superior's consent to go himself to Nantes, and reconnoitre the position. Three weeks later, a visit from the Abbé Richard, Vicar-General of the Bishop of Nantes, convinced Mère de la Providence that the suggestion indeed came from God.

But how was it to be accomplished ? Even to one of her boundless confidence, it was somewhat disconcerting to be told to make a new foundation when the little Society had barely reached maturity. The prospect alarmed her. One day, during Mass, at that solemn moment between the two Elevations, Our Lord seemed to reproach her for her want of confidence. If she had refused to found her Society until someone had given her a house and an assured income, she would still be at the rue St. Martin. " The only thing that is necessary," she said to herself, " is to be certain of the sympathy of a few families ; I will ask God for help to pay our rent for the first few years, and as for the rest we will abandon ourselves to Providence, keeping faithfully the distinctive mark of the Society : the spirit of faith."

This generous self-abandonment met with Père Basuiau's entire approval, and he advised her to await developments. But when three weeks passed without a word from Nantes, Mère de la Providence grew a little uneasy, and, according to her usual custom, asked for a sign. This time it was to be a letter from Nantes.

The following day while she was talking to her director the portress brought in the letters ; there were two from Nantes. She could not quite repress her emotion at this immediate answer to her

request, and uttered a fervent word of thanks to her Divine Providence. Père Basuiau looked at her suspiciously : " You have been asking for a sign again ? " but it was impossible to scold the " spoilt child " since Providence so evidently approved of her methods.

As a result of these letters Père Basuiau went to Nantes to investigate the matter and make the preliminary arrangements. A house that seemed eminently suitable for the purpose was found, and a fortnight later the Abbé Richard wrote to say that not only did the Bishop consent to the foundation at Nantes, but was keenly interested in the Society. Mère de la Providence expressed her deep gratitude to his Lordship, and told him the conditions under which she would come.

(1) That the interest on the sum borrowed for the purchase of the house should be guaranteed for five years.

(2) That sufficient furniture be provided for the ten sisters who would be installed there.

Many prayers were offered up by the Community, and another sign of the Divine Will demanded by the " spoilt child." If Monsieur Angebault would give 18,000 to 20,000 francs in four or five years, she would take it as a clear proof that God willed the foundation. The following day, Père Basuiau sent her a letter from Monsieur Angebault in which he promised to pay for five years the interest of the sum borrowed for the house, provided it did not exceed 5,000 francs a year ; he also offered to supply some of the furniture. Mère de la Providence at once informed the Bishop that the necessary assistance was

guaranteed, and on receiving His Lordship's formal approbation, she agreed to buy the house at Nantes and to pay the first instalment on August 30, when the Community would take possession.

Consequently, in the afternoon of June 29, Père Basuiau was obliged to return to Nantes as Mgr. Jacquemet would only discuss money matters with him. The Souls in Purgatory most devoted to the Sacred Heart were promised twenty-five Ways of the Cross if all was satisfactorily settled.

That same morning Mère de la Providence left Paris with three of her daughters : Mère St. Augustin, Mère St. Pierre, and her own sister, Mère St. Ignace. A kind benefactor, Monsieur Lafargue, met them at Nantes and gave them a cordial invitation from his wife to stay at their house, but rooms had already been engaged at the Hotel, as they had unfortunately failed to find hospitality in a Convent. So, with a promise to call on Madame Lafargue that evening the nuns drove to the Hôtel de France. The weary, way-worn wanderers were longing for rest, but as no beds were prepared, they partook of a light supper, and then went in accordance with their promise to call on their kind benefactors. The Reverend Mother was utterly exhausted with the fatigues and anxieties of the day, and her companions were somewhat in the same condition, so, after a short visit, they returned to the Hotel accompanied by Monsieur Lafargue, who, on saying good night, added : " Above all, Reverend Mother, do not fail to make use of me ; send for me even during the night if necessary."

The next morning Mère de la Providence and Mère St. Pierre called at the Jesuit residence, and while they were consulting Père Basuiau as to their plans, the Father Superior came in and welcomed them to Nantes. On hearing that they were staying at the Hôtel de France, " You have chosen well," he said grimly, " there is not a worse one in the place."

They had a busy day before them, so after a few cordial words they departed to call on Monsieur Angebault. He was not at home, so they went to the Bishop's house to see the Abbé Richard. He was in the country with the Bishop, who was too ill to receive any visitors. But Mère de la Providence had an indomitable spirit that always rose to difficulties. " All is well," she remarked to her director, " it must be so, because everything is going wrong." However, she proceeded to inspect the house, the conventual appearance of which appealed to her at once, as well as the stone staircase—such a godsend to the sisters who would be spared the trouble of polishing it ; a large room on the first floor would make an excellent chapel, three windows opened on to a terrace, with a fine view over a spacious garden ; the whole house was in excellent repair.

Mère de la Providence could not conceal her delight, in spite of warning signs from the prudent Jesuit, who thought it unwise to show too much satisfaction in presence of the proprietor. But when the holy Foundress began talking, in her own inimitable manner, of her life's work, the man was completely captivated. " It is a beautiful devotion," he remarked,

"God will reward you for it." His admiration took an unusually practical form when he announced later that the purchase-money need not be paid till 1871, and that he would not ask for even the first instalment of the sum until they had been in the house a whole year. That same evening the nuns left the Hotel and accepted the hospitality of Monsieur and Madame Lafargue. The next day, when all were assembled at the house of Mademoiselle Terrien, Monsieur and Madame Angebault came in, and in the course of conversation promised an altar, a crucifix, candlesticks, and black vestments, if the first Mass were said for a daughter who had died six months before.

Divine Providence was indeed showering gifts on this "spoilt child," but she had set her heart on an interview with the Bishop. How was it to be accomplished? His Lordship was away in the country too ill to receive visitors. However, Mère de la Providence betook herself to the Cathedral. She had overcome greater obstacles than these. She simply asked Divine Providence to be so good as to arrange an interview with the Bishop that day, so that they might return to Paris on the morrow.

In the afternoon they all assembled at the lawyer's office, where the title-deeds were duly signed, and Monsieur Angebault made himself legally responsible for the interest on the total amount, and made a private memorandum of various requisites for the chapel. Mother Foundress was touched by all the kindness and generosity shown her by these hitherto total strangers. The afternoon was wearing on, and

no sign had yet come from the Episcopal Palace. She tried to be completely resigned, but . . . Providence helps those who help themselves. Why not make one last effort ? Monsieur Angebault had been so extremely kind, surely he would not refuse a crowning benefit ? " I do beg you to take a carriage and go to His Lordship in the country," she said. " Tell him that everything is settled, that Mère de la Providence has come 150 miles to see him. Ask if he will be kind enough to give us an audience to-morrow morning, and allow Père Basuiau to see him in the afternoon." " I cannot refuse you anything, I will go at once," replied the old man.

But Divine Providence had arranged it otherwise. Hardly had the Mother Foundress returned to the Lafargue's house when Mère St. Ignace came in quickly, saying : " Make haste, do make haste, Mother, where are your bonnet and shawl ? " Before she quite grasped the reason for all this excitement someone else ran in with : " Will the Reverend Mother please be quick, the Bishop is expecting her"; so the Foundress, with Mère St. Ignace, hurried into the carriage, which was well on its way to the Bishop's palace before she quite realized what had happened !

This audience had been obtained thus unexpectedly through the good offices of Mgr. Chalandon, a very intimate friend of Mgr. Jacquemet, who having learnt of the proposed foundation at Nantes, had immediately recommended Mère de la Providence, whom he always called his " dear child," to the

Bishop's fatherly interest and care, and this recommendation had carried the day.

The Bishop, in spite of very evident physical weakness, received his visitors with marked cordiality. " I have had a very kind letter from Mgr. Chalandon about you," he said to Mère de la Providence. " His Lordship will have told you that I am his spiritual child." " Yes, yes, his child," he replied, and added : " I am glad you are making a foundation in my diocese. You will be a great help to the people here who have not yet been robbed of their Faith. You will do them much good." Mère de la Providence then explained the object and the works of the little Society, and the extraordinarily easy terms on which she had acquired the house. " All that is providential, Mother," said the Bishop, " for the people of Nantes do not as a rule manage their business in that manner. We must indeed praise the Lord. Your work is eminently Christian and was a need in the Church."

After a little more conversation, Mère de la Providence presented the list of Benedictions which the Archbishop of Paris had sanctioned. His Lordship studied the list attentively. " This might almost mean every day in the year," he said. However, he told her to leave the paper with him and he would see that it was ready for her daughters when they arrived. Just as she was telling him that she hoped to establish the new foundation the following September, there was a knock at the door and Père Basuiau was announced. Mère de la Providence rose to go. " No, Mother, stay, we must talk this matter over together."

And then he continued, " All that Reverend Mother has been telling me is really very remarkable, but all is going too well—I fear a cross." "So do I, my Lord," said Père Basuiau. But Mère de la Providence intervened with, "No, no, the Holy Souls are the advocates of forlorn hopes."

After a few more words they all knelt for the Bishop's blessing, and, contrary to custom, he drew off his Episcopal ring for them to kiss, and escorted them to the door himself.

This most cordial reception exceeded their highest expectations, for the stiff etiquette of the Episcopal palace was proverbial in the diocese. " I have never been received so warmly before. I owe you this," admitted Père Basuiau. " It is indeed supernatural, no one can understand it," exclaimed the Superior of the Jesuits, Père Marquet, and as Mère de la Providence knelt for his blessing he could not refrain from adding : " But, Mother, you are receiving more precious blessings than any I can give."

On July 2 they all returned to Paris after three strenuous days, but it was not until December that the sisters were installed in their new house at Nantes with Mère du Sacré Cœur as Superior.

The story of the foundation at Nantes is typical of every new house founded by the Helpers of the Holy Souls. We find the same blind trust in the face of every imaginable obstacle, and the same marvellous ways in which Divine Providence responds to this trust.

The health of the Mother Foundress had certainly been impaired by the constant stress of her

responsibilities, and she was advised by Père Basuiau to give over a part of her arduous duties to a local Superior. Mère St. François de Borgia was accordingly nominated, and on January 29, 1865, the Community celebrated the beginning of the Generalate of their Mother Foundress.

Mère de la Providence was very ill throughout February, suffering acutely. Her director reminded her that it was only to be expected; her life would probably be one long suffering, it was the price she must pay for her foundation. Père de Ponlevoy echoed the same opinion. "She will always suffer, she will find herself often hard pressed by financial difficulties, but Divine Providence will always come to her aid."

Her physical pain, however, was nothing as compared with the desolation of her soul. "God alone knows what I am going through," she said to her director. "So much the better, my child, but do not be afraid of death; this very fear proves that you are not going to die at present, you will, perhaps, have to suffer a great deal before that comes, and when you are actually dying, you will not be afraid." After ten days of intense pain, offered for the Holy Souls, she was a little better. "To-day, I asked if I could go to Mass," she noted in her diary, "but the Father told me to be reasonable. But I really have been very reasonable, it seems to me. For twelve days I have not left my room, nor expressed any wish to do so! My God, I have given myself to Thee, therefore there is nothing further to be said, but I no longer recognize myself, I seem now to have only one

devotion, that of submitting to Thy will ; Thy will is everything to me."

During these trying days of illness she was weighed down by an unusual fit of depression for which even her physical state could hardly account. Perhaps it was a foreboding of future sorrow ? When Père Basuiau told her he was coming to say Mass for her in St. Joseph's Oratory for a special intention on three mornings in succession her fears were aroused. What was this special intention ? The Father spoke enigmatically of patience and submission, but what did it all mean ? She felt more and more uneasy, as the shadow of some unknown sorrow was thrown across her path.

In her diary at this date we read :

Monday, February 27. I heard Mass for the first time for a fortnight in the Oratory, alone with Sister St. Augustin. I did so want to be fervent, but it was impossible. During Mass I was deeply struck by the thought that God alone exists ; everything else is as nothing ; all creatures, through illness and suffering of various kinds, gradually pass away ; all crumble into dust and ashes, but God alone is. . . . I felt my heart expand with this thought. The Father to whom I confided these thoughts and feelings told me that during his meditation to-day he, too, was struck with the same idea, " God alone," and everything else fades away, and is absorbed as a sponge absorbs moisture.

Tuesday, February 28. I heard Mass again in the Oratory. At the Consecration I said to myself : " We are united in the breaking of Bread. O, My God,

unite our hearts in Thy Love for time and for Eternity." After his Mass, Père Basuiau remained longer than usual in the Oratory, and when Mère de la Providence referred to it he answered : " Time passes quickly when I am praying for my children." He loved to say his Mass in the perfect quiet of the Oratory, and repeated several times " How good God is ! " In the afternoon he came again to give Benediction, but it was very evident that his mind was preoccupied, and again that painful foreboding took possession of the Mother General.

At the beginning of St. Joseph's month for the third time Père Basuiau said his Mass in the Oratory; a little later, when the Mother General and he were talking together, he began speaking of a life of sacrifice contrasting it with a peaceful life. " A peaceful life is not one for a Jesuit and would not suit me at all," he remarked. " You prefer the life of a Jesuit in the thick of the fight ? " " Yes, most decidedly," was the quick rejoinder.

After a blessing, he took his leave. Reverend Mother, more puzzled than ever, had a distinct foreboding of some pending sacrifice. The feeling haunted her all day, and as the time for Benediction drew near, she went down to the chapel with a heart full of unutterable sadness. The altar was ready for Benediction. Mère de la Providence looked up as the priest entered, hoping against hope: it was Père Longhaye who had come to give the Benediction. When it was over he told her that Père Basuiau was leaving that evening for Amiens. Why had he given no

hint of this departure ? She felt in her heart that there was something more behind it all. " I have made every effort to abandon myself and to will what God wills," she wrote in her diary. " O, my Master, Thou knowest what I am suffering, give me Thy strength and Thy help."

A few days later there was a letter from Père Basuiau which only mystified her the more. " O, my God, nothing happens without Thy permission," she cried as the days passed by in the same painful state of uncertainty. The suspense was soon over, however. On March 10, she learnt that Père Basuiau had offered himself for the Chinese Mission, and had been accepted. Why had he not prepared her for this sacrifice ? Did he mean never to come again to the rue de la Barouillère. " He must have thought you very strong to give you this hard blow," said the Father Provincial.

Looking back on the events of the last two or three weeks she understood now the meaning of it all. The deep conviction of the reality of God's existence that had come to both of them, the three Masses said for a special intention, the Father's ill-concealed agitation, that foreboding of future sorrow : all had been sent to prepare her for, perhaps, the very hardest cross she could have been asked to bear. Not only did she feel her own personal loss of a beloved and holy friend and director, but the loss to her cherished Society, which owed almost everything to this good priest.

One morning after Holy Communion a ray of hope lit up the darkness of her path. Our Lord seemed to

say to her, " I gave him to you without any human intervention, and I will give him back to you in the same way " ; God's ways are not our ways ; how little did the Mother Foundress guess that the Father would indeed be given back to the Society in three years' time, but in China, not in Paris.

The Community at Nantes shared in the general mourning over the loss of this friend. Mère de la Providence wrote all that she knew about the matter to her daughters and preached patience and resignation to them. She said that the Father sent his blessing to all, but wished them generously to sacrifice any correspondence with him, and added : " this is my opinion and I am giving it to you quite frankly because you have a right to know all. Our Father is going to England for three or four months to perfect himself in the language ; from there he will sail for China for an indefinite period, perhaps for ever, and as he could not then keep up a correspondence he does not wish to begin it, he is therefore breaking it off at once. The dear Father knew it all beforehand and yet he said nothing to us, he alone knows why. What must we say about it, my dearest daughters ? Just resign ourselves to God's Will, and accept from His Hands this most heavy Cross. More than ever must obedience bind us to our little Society, and if we are its true children we ought to feel in this hour of trial the intense need of being united to each other, and proving by practice, rather than by theory, that we do indeed form but one heart and one soul in the Heart of Our Divine Lord. I know it is unnecessary to ask you to

pray constantly for our Father, for I am convinced that your prayers will follow him throughout his voyage."

There was still a little hope he might be left in Paris, for could he not, as Procurator, superintend the affairs of the Jesuits in China remaining himself in France ? On April 8 we find this comment in her diary : " Our Lord recalls to me these words he addressed to St. Catherine of Siena : ' Think of Me and I will think of thee,' " adding " I chose thee for this work before Père Basuiau, rely on Me."

In spite of all her courage and resignation, the Mother Foundress was suffering in every fibre of her sensitive being, suffering in a way that only those can understand who have experienced the breaking of a holy friendship, which loses none of its human intensity because it is founded on a mutual Love of God. A friend had come into her life who understood everything—an experience that comes but once in a life-time, and that friend was suddenly snatched away from her.

It was her hour of bitter agony, and if, for a time, she was crushed to the ground, her heart-felt " Not as I will, but as Thou wilt " soon lifted her up again, and sent her with calm courage to face her difficulties alone. " I find a little respite in the thought that I am undergoing my Purgatory here below," she noted in her diary. " I am separated from all that brought me peace and tranquillity of mind ; I could never describe the desolation of my soul ; My Jesus, draw me out of this state by some means or other ; when I feel overwhelmed with the burden of my own weakness,

and of having to be the support of my little Community, I repeat 'I can do all things through Him Who strengtheneth me.' My God, if I find it impossible to say 'Alleluia,' all the same I do say deep down in my heart 'Fiat,' for such intense sufferings must bring down great blessings."

A visit to Nantes consoled the Mother Foundress. It seemed as if her sufferings had already borne fruit, for the little Community established there was doing splendid work and winning the esteem of all.

Père Basuiau continued his studies in England, and as the appointed time for his departure to the East drew near, Mère de la Providence determined to make one last attempt to change the decision of his Superiors. On June 14 she wrote to the Father General of the Jesuits in Rome, pointing out to him the irreparable loss to her newly founded Society if its spiritual director were withdrawn. Having dispatched her letter, she left herself and her Society in God's Hands, and waited calmly for the answer, which would prove conclusively the Divine Will.

She was still awaiting the answer from Rome, when Père Longhaye called at the Convent with the welcome news that Père Basuiau had just returned, and would come to see her the next morning at ten o'clock. The following day, Père Basuiau arrived at the appointed time. In spite of all her efforts, the Mother General could not conceal her grief. "My poor child," he said gently, "the Love of God and His Will must come first of all." "Yes, indeed, Father," she replied, "otherwise you and I would not be religious." "God is

asking this sacrifice of us, we must make it generously," was his reply.

" Oh, Father," exclaimed Mère de la Providence, "I have not reached that point of perfection."

" Your way is an exceptional one. It is by suffering that your work will spread ... perhaps it will always be so."

And then, in his most matter-of-fact tone, he said : " I am going to see the novices to-day ; on Saturday, the aspirants and the professed, and on Sunday we will discuss everything together. I will postpone replying to your questions till then."

No answer had come as yet from the General of the Society of Jesus, and though Père Basuiau took his departure for granted, there was still a faint chance that the appeal made by Mère de la Providence might be favourably considered.

But her hopes were soon extinguished by a letter from Father General himself, in which, after having assured her of his deep appreciation for her Society and his constant remembrance in his prayers, he proceeded :

> " I can quite understand that the departure of Père Basuiau for China is a great trial to you. It is only after mature consideration before God that I have yielded to his own request to spend some time in that vast empire, in order to gain a more accurate knowledge of those missions of which he is the Procurator. This request seemed to me to be inspired by the Holy Spirit; I am therefore bound to believe that whilst this voyage will be useful to the interests of our missions, at the same time, Divine

Goodness will not allow it to be harmful to yours. God has so many means of turning to our advantage events which to us seem so opposed to it."

Mère de la Providence had felt that her duty to her Society impelled her to make every effort to keep this wise and holy director, but now God's Will was unmistakable, they must bow their heads in complete submission. The last few days passed all too quickly, and although the good Father was setting forth on this long voyage to China, he devoted every spare minute to the Community, as though he had nothing else to do. Each sister had a special word of advice and encouragement to help her through her trials and difficulties.

"God's ways are impenetrable; we often fail to understand here below what we shall understand some day in heaven, and then we shall rejoice at seeing what the Master in His Mercy had concealed under the covering of trial." These were the last words that Père Basuiau said to Mère de la Providence.

He left Paris on July 14, and embarked at Marseilles a few days later. Could she have looked into the future, Mère de la Providence would have seen two of her own daughters on board that self-same ship, facing with loving confidence all the hardships of the foreign missions, and on that far-off Eastern shore Père Basuiau waiting to welcome those first missionaries. Had not Our Lord told Mère de la Providence "I gave him to you without any human intervention, and I will give him back to you in the same way."

Père Olivaint, S J.

Chapter X

THE DIRECTION OF PÈRE OLIVAINT, S.J.

THE departure of Père Basuiau marked the beginning of a new era in the life of Mère de la Providence. Henceforth she must face her difficulties alone, as far as human aid was concerned. A profound mistrust of her own judgment, arising from her inexperience, had driven her to seek his advice in every detail, but now her Novitiate was over and she must take the entire responsibility on her own shoulders. Père de Ponlevoy wrote from Vannes : " Since you are called Mère de la Providence prove yourself the child thereof. If there is a special assistance from on high given to each soul in particular, how much more for a number of souls united in one great enterprise for God's Glory. God bless you and all yours at Nantes."

Soon after Père Basuiau's departure, Père Olivaint, the new Rector, withdrew their Jesuit confessor, and the Mother General naturally concluded that this was but the prelude to a complete severing of all friendly relations with these Fathers on whom she depended so much. However, a reassuring letter soon came from Père Olivaint reminding her that the privilege hitherto enjoyed was contrary to the rules and customs of the Society of Jesus, and was bound to come to an end

sooner or later. He assured her, however, that he had no intention whatever of withdrawing the protection of his house. On the contrary he promised every help that was compatible with their Constitutions. He soon proved his sincerity by a friendly visit to the rue de la Barouillère, and although he was not able to give the Community retreat, he sent a very good substitute.

Mère de la Providence was deeply grateful for all the help and support she received from many holy priests and religious, but she sorely needed a spiritual guide who would lead her safely and firmly through the many difficulties that beset her way.

The work of Père Basuiau was finished, and that of Père Olivaint was about to begin, but for a time she was left to struggle on alone, shouldering her responsibilities, and bearing her burden of anxieties and interior trials. "My God, Thou hast broken me, Thou hast crushed me by taking away the support that Thou hadst given me, I bless Thee for this—all things work together for good to those who love Thee. What shall I think of this on my death bed?"

God's fatherly care was manifest in her regard. Monsieur l'Abbé Pernot of the Foreign Missions offered to say Mass at the rue de la Barouillère on the sole condition that there should be no question of stipend and about this time the Fathers of the Society of Jesus communicated to her some of their documents such as the General Examen for Novices, the book of Instructions for Novices, and also one for the Juniorship, as well as Commentaries on the Rule, etc.

Over and above all, Mère de la Providence was learning, through her mental sufferings, the Divine art of helping and consoling others. Thus it was that all could turn to her in their troubles and perplexities, knowing that she would understand and impart to them some of her own splendid strength and courage.

"What a change in my whole being! I feel my mind expanding." "Suffering bravely borne means a victory over selfishness." "The more we are emptied of self, the more we can be filled with God," we find in her diary.

For some time past, the Foundress had been anxious about the confined space and want of air; the garden at the back of the house was very small and shut in, and of course the Community had increased enormously. St. Joseph was invoked to find a country home where the nuns could rest from their labours and lay in a fresh store of energy. A very suitable property was soon discovered at Clamart (just outside Paris) and Mother General undaunted by a microscopic bank balance, approached a lawyer with "we have no money, in fact, nothing but debts, but if you care to undertake this business for us under these conditions remember you have been warned." Her simple, straightforward manner decided the lawyer to risk his fees and draw up the necessary documents. "St. Joseph has found the property," she said, "and he will not fail to find the money to pay for it." What could St. Joseph do but respond, and it was no grudging response, for he added a neighbouring property.

Père Basuiau had not been gone a year when

another blow fell on the Community ; early in July the news came that the Abbé Gabriel had been drowned while boating with a friend. He had resigned his living a few months before in order to devote himself more to his beloved religious family in the rue de la Barouillère.

The Mother General and her Community were stricken with sorrow, which found relief in countless prayers for the departed Superior. "My dear child, I depend on you not to leave me in Purgatory," he said once to Mère de la Providence, and the Society gladly offered many Communions, Rosaries, Stations of the Cross for the repose of his soul. The nuns watched by his coffin in the parish church of St. Merry, and followed him to the grave, for never could hey repay him for all his kindness and care in the early days of the Foundation. We must remember that although not a Founder he had been set apart by Almighty God as an essential agent for the success and development of the young religious Foundation. Without his help what could Eugénie Smet have done in 1856 ? *With* his help she was received everywhere and, above all, he opened the way for her with the Archbishop of Paris. As Curé of an important parish on excellent terms with Archbishop Sibour, his patronage had been an inestimable boon to the unknown Foundress, and when Père Basuiau undertook the spiritual direction of the Community, the Abbé Gabriel never raised the smallest objection because he considered any good done to the Helpers of the Holy Souls as a personal favour to himself. On the occasion of his being made a

domestic prelate to the Holy Father, the year before his tragic death, a beautiful ring engraved with the word "gratitude," was presented by the Foundress to this devoted Father who had befriended the Community in the days of rue St. Martin.

When asked to preach the panegyric of St. Ignatius at the Jesuit Church, "How could I refuse," he said simply, "your Fathers are so good to us." In the history of these ten years (1856 to 1866) one does not meet with even a shadow of misunderstanding between the Abbé Gabriel and Père Basuiau, or between him and any of those who were called to give their ministrations to the Community at the rue de la Barouillère. It is a sweet consolation to be able to say that this fraternal concord is to the glory of all concerned and that it still further endears the memory of the Abbé Gabriel.

Amongst all her letters of condolence, none touched the Mother General's heart more than the few words she received from the Rector of the Jesuit house in the rue de Sèvres. "Events of this kind make a work like yours doubly appreciated," he wrote. "Confidence and courage, dear Rev. Mother, Our Lord is still here; He is the chief Superior of your family, and you will soon experience His merciful assistance." The Father did not then foresee the large part that God was about to confide to him in his merciful designs.

In September, 1866, Père Olivaint gave the annual retreat to the Community, and when, at the very beginning, he struck the chord of confidence and love, the Mother General knew that the hearts of all his listeners

would respond. She had now been struggling on for a year without any definite direction. In spite of all her efforts, she could not reconcile herself to Père Basuiau's departure. Her physical sufferings and her need of guidance through the tangle of difficulties that beset her path, had brought her perilously near the Slough of Despond, but Our Lord was about to send His trusted servant, for had she not begged for a guide burning with Love for Him—a second Père de la Colombière.

When she told Père Olivaint of her sorrow the Father gently reproached her for having yielded to this depression.

"God willed this parting so that you might learn to lean on Him alone. Do not speak about it again, it is much wiser." And then he continued, "I am astonished that you have not more confidence in Our Lord after all the graces you have received." The Father's strong vigorous counsels inspired her with confidence, and she decided to make a general confession of her whole life, before definitely asking him to undertake her spiritual direction. Père Olivaint had his own methods of brushing aside any irrelevant matter and getting down to bed-rock, but it was somewhat disconcerting to be told : *Sabrez-moi tout cela*, "Cut out all that," when Mère de la Providence was dwelling on those minor anxieties to which a sensitive conscience is prone. However, she knew the kind heart that underlay this brusque manner. "My child," said the Father, "you are worrying over things that can do you no harm whatever, and you are paying no attention

to this tendency to sadness, which really is a hindrance. The interest I have in you compels me to speak." And then he went still further. "You have but little confidence and therefore little courage and energy." A less humble penitent might have been upset at this very plain speaking, but the wise priest knew that he need not mince matters with this heroic soul, whose whole will was turned towards God, and who never faltered on the rugged path of perfection despite the opposition in her sensitive nature. So it was agreed that Père Olivaint should continue the work that Père Basuiau had begun. "I shall not be able to give you as much time as you need," he announced frankly. "It is no use promising what I could not fulfil. But if it is merely a question of giving you some advice, you can depend on me." And then, with a quizzical smile, he added: "You little know with what sort of a customer you are dealing."

Père Olivaint's retreat was a never-to-be-forgotten event in the annals of the Society. Loving confidence was the theme that ran through all the meditations, and although he disapproved of amusing stories he insisted on fresh air and more free time during the strenuous eight days. The Mother General had hoped much from this retreat, but it surpassed even her highest hopes.

Père Olivaint was called upon to play an important part in the development of Mère de la Providence and the Society. Gifted with wonderful insight into character, he realized at once the unusual qualities of this humble-minded Foundress who had accomplished

so much. He saw her splendid natural gifts, her keen intelligence, and clear judgment, her eager, spontaneous nature capable of great enthusiasm, and, above all, the great warm heart of this heroic mother. The wise director saw also the weak points in this beautiful but human character. She was very impressionable and inclined sometimes to yield too much to her impulses. A sensitive, highly strung temperament like hers was foredoomed to suffering. There were times when her whole soul was invaded with doubts and fears, when she doubted her vocation, divine goodness, and even the immortality of the soul. They were merely temptations which never touched her will, but, nevertheless, they seemed to weigh her down and reduce her sometimes to a pitiable state of weakness and inaction. "Cut out all that" had been Père Olivaint's method of dealing with these difficulties, and two months after the retreat he wrote "This is but a trial, and you are yielding almost unconsciously to that indefinable bitterness which is permeating your whole being. Confidence, my child, even foolish confidence. After all that Our Lord has done for you, what ingratitude if you do not depend absolutely on Him."

Confidence was indeed the alpha and omega of Père Olivaint's direction. "Make your meditation on confidence," he wrote. "It seems incredible that confidence need be trumpeted in the ears of one who has been so specially favoured by Providence."

When Père Olivaint first heard the story of the foundation of the Society he could scarcely find words to express his astonishment. "I have never heard

anything like it. If after that you do not trust Our Lord you deserve to be hanged."

On another occasion he said : " I want you to be a truly valiant woman, not an impressionable one. A valiant woman frees herself from all created things that she may live a supernatural life ; she rises above her feelings and dwells in the regions of faith and reason. If she cannot bear her sufferings joyfully, she is at least resigned to them, and if she chooses to be a weather-cock, it is only that she may turn at the least breath of God's will." The Father once congratulated her on having disagreed with him on the question of a possible postulant. " I do not wish my direction to act as an extinguisher, or to rob you of any initiative, you must keep your own personality ; I am very glad that you have told me your objections. Your Community is a band of chosen souls, not a shelf for any odds and ends that are picked up. Moreover, a valiant woman makes up her mind, and sticks to it." All this goes to prove that Mère de la Providence was but human, and if she did exaggerate her faults and sometimes mistake temptation for sin, surely it brings her very near to ourselves and teaches us the great lesson that faults are not incompatible with sanctity, and that saints are not ready-made, but have to fashion their heavenly garments from the same material as we ordinary mortals. Does not God in His infinite wisdom often allow small blemishes to remain, even in His greatest saints, that they may be immune from the deadliest of all sins—pride. Père Olivaint knew that his penitent's will was firmly fixed on God and no

temptations ever invaded that stronghold of her soul. He very soon realized that the Mother General's path to heaven was to be a veritable "Via Dolorosa," and though he longed sometimes to make the way easier for her, he knew he would thereby be frustrating God's designs. For had He not marked out for suffering this precious soul on whom He had showered His richest gifts? "Your perpetual sufferings seem to me quite as supernatural as they are natural," he remarked, "they are all part of God's own special designs for you. I may be mistaken, but I cannot see these things in any other light." She had offered herself as a victim for the Holy Souls, and God had accepted the holocaust; what then could she expect but suffering in mind and body and heart and soul?

"There is no mistake about it," he said, "suffering is the vocation of a Helper, and how much more of the Foundress. But if you want to avoid suffering, I will give you a very good recipe, give up your vocation as a Helper, for, as I said before, your sufferings form part of God's designs for you and for your Institute. How can the Holy Souls be delivered without suffering?" Over and over again Père Olivaint repeated the same words, making no attempt to soften down their crude austerity. He was speaking to a heroic soul inflamed with love to bear her long, drawn-out martyrdom, for had she not ever before her eyes that beloved crucified Jesus, and her cup of bitterness became sweet because His lips had tasted it first. It was feared at the time that Mère de Borgia would lose her sight. Père Olivaint characteristically remarked:

" If our good Mère de Borgia becomes blind she will suffer for the Souls in Purgatory who do not see God. The vocation of a Helper is to suffer ; it is her distinctive privilege ! "

It has been said that the withdrawing of oneself from human sympathy is Calvary's hardest lesson. Mère de la Providence, like all truly tender natures, longed sometimes for human sympathy herself, but that had to be relinquished with all the rest. Our Lord had trodden the wine-press alone and she must follow in His footsteps. One morning, when kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, she said to herself : " Why am I so anxious that Père Olivaint should understand all about my trials ; is it because I want him to curtail my daily sacrifices, or take me down from my Cross ? No . . . or is it because I want him to comfort me ? Frankly, he has enough to do without that. Let us go to Our Blessed Lord for consolation." Thus gradually did her Divine Spouse draw her closer to Himself into a loving intimacy that brooks no intruders, but this union could only be consummated when her heart was entirely empty of all self-love. " You must be stripped of self and then Jesus will fill your heart, because He is looking for a heart devoid of all earthly things. You think your spiritual life is burning itself out, but when once you possess Jesus, you will not be afraid of that, for Jesus is a fire that is never extinguished."

" I do not want you to be constrained," said her director, " the supernatural must come naturally to you. I want you to make use of your ardent nature to

win souls to Our Lord, first of all those of your own daughters then those of the world outside. May the sweetness of Jesus in you draw all to Him."

" Is Our Lord no longer in the Tabernacle, are the keys of the house no longer at Our Lady's feet—has St. Joseph gone away ? " Père Olivaint's words seem to echo down the years and bring us to-day his strong message with all its vigour unimpaired by the course of time.

The venerated Foundress had passed through her novitiate under Père Basuiau who had purposely kept her under strict obedience; Père Olivaint now wished to make her understand that this period of transition was over and that she must learn to take the initiative, to shoulder all the responsibilities of her charge. Mère de la Providence loved to speak of her seven years' Novitiate as her seven years of plenty, and indeed God had dealt bountifully with her, both directly and indirectly through Père Basuiau, and the Society of Jesus, through whom such a rich harvest had been laid up in the spiritual granaries of the Institute. Had He not also showered down gifts of mind and heart on the Foundress whose just judgment, practical common sense, marvellous power of attraction, unfailing kindness, and burning love for souls marked her out as one of God's elect.

The time had now come for her to understand completely the magnificent mission entrusted to her, and to fulfil it with heroism. Although she fully realized the necessity for personal action, she was so profoundly grateful for Père Olivaint's virile direction that

she wrote to the Father General of the Jesuits to express her gratitude. On July 22, 1867, she received the following reply :

" Dear Reverend Mother,

" In the midst of overwhelming occupations which the recent Feasts have brought upon me I have delayed answering your kind letter, but I have not delayed praying for you at the altar, also for your dear Community and for Père Olivaint, whom you so earnestly recommend to my prayers. You have realized that the Cross placed above the Heart of Jesus is an invitation to all the true friends of the Divine Master to devote themselves lovingly to sacrifice. I do indeed rejoice over this, and congratulate you, for whoever loves renunciation loves Jesus, and is following Him closely and walking with great strides towards Life Everlasting. When you are asking for this practical love of the Cross for yourself and for your religious, please think sometimes of me and the Fathers of the Society towards whom you feel such filial affection.

" With kindest regards,

" I am, dear Reverend Mother,

" Your humble servant in Jesus Christ,

Pierre Beckx.

"*General of the Society of Jesus.*"

Chapter XI

THE CALL TO THE CHINESE MISSION

ON November 15, 1866 (St. Gertrude's day), a slight change was made in the habit. The silver cross bearing the motto of the Order was now to be worn on a silver chain instead of on a black cord.

Towards the end of the year the Marquise de Rende had obtained from the Sovereign Pontiff a special Indulgence for the Associates for the recitation of the *Salve Regina* at the end of their Monday meetings, and this news arrived at the rue de la Barouillère on December 31.

That very evening, Mère de la Providence, in replying to the good wishes for the New Year offered by the Superior of the house, said : " Thank you, my dear daughters, thank you for all you have wished me. I beg Our Lord to grant every one of you a blessed year. Perhaps I have not the courage to ask that it may be blessed by the Cross, but let us all resolve to leave ourselves in God's Hands that He may sanctify us, accepting every trial gratefully as a special mark of favour. What could be better or more profitable for the Holy Souls ? Yes, let us strive for an ever closer union with Our Lord and with each other. May Jesus alone dwell in our hearts, and our hearts be alone with Jesus. Is not this true happiness to a

religious ? Ask Him to give us His New Year's gift of peace, the peace of His Sacred Heart, and the courage to offer ourselves each day of this New Year as a victim sacrificed to His Love—saying 'I am content, My God, provided that Thou art.' "

The Superior to whom she addressed these words was the first to be chosen by God to be the victim of His Love. Mère St. François de Borgia had long been troubled with failing eyesight ; neither prayers not surgery availed, but her sightless eyes could penetrate so far into the great Eternal Truths that later on she was given the important work of training the novices. Moreover, it was she who wrote down at the Mother General's dictation the history of the Foundation and the marvellous favours showered on the Society by Divine Providence.

On January 19, 1867, Père Fouillet, S.J., the father in charge of the Tertianship, sent a message to Mère de la Providence that he would willingly allow the translation of all that would be useful to the Helpers of the Holy Souls in the Rules of the Third Year. This was a very great favour which he wished to confer on the Society.

Mère de la Providence, through the Marquise de Rende, made many appeals to Rome for special Indulgences both for her Society and the Associates. Sometimes her requests were granted, but occasionally the Holy Father thought the Foundress was venturing too far, as when she wanted a Plenary Indulgence for saying the Office of the Dead ! " That is a little too much," said His Holiness, which did not, however,

prevent him from granting a very great favour unasked. On the Feast of St. Ignatius the Community heard the joyful news that the Portiuncula Indulgence had been granted to their chapel. "The whole day has been blessed by Our Lord," wrote the Mother General, on August 2, "our Sisters went in and out of the chapel 4,000 times. I have only twenty visits to my own account, but, indeed, I have every reason to believe that the Holy Souls are solaced if not delivered from their sufferings."

On August 4, of the same year, an unexpected event happened which was destined to hold an important place in the future history of the Society.

In the summer of 1867, Mgr. Languillat, S.J., Bishop of Sergiopolis, arrived at the Jesuit residence in the rue de Sèvres, having come to Europe on purpose to find religious communities for China. The Mother General must have known the object of the Bishop's visit to Europe, and though the Foreign Missions had always attracted her, yet it never occurred to her as remotely possible that her young Society could send out Missionaries for many a long day. True, she had at various times discussed the possibility with Mère du Sacré Cœur, and had emphatically discouraged her hopes in that direction, and when an eager young novice, Sister St. Paul, spoke of her long cherished desire for the Foreign Missions both the Mother General and Père Basuiau dismissed the suggestion to the region of forlorn hopes. However, the Holy Souls, being the advocates of forlorn hopes, were not deaf to the little novice's prayers !

Monseigneur Languillat, S.J., Bishop of Sergiopolis,
Vicar-Apostolic of Nanking

On August 3, the Mother General called at the rue de Sèvres to pay her respects to the Bishop. He had come from Shanghai, and it was just possible he might give her news of Père Basuiau. The Bishop received her very kindly and on her invitation promised to say Mass at the rue de la Barouillère the following morning, for he loved the Holy Souls and often prayed for the one who suffered most.

" My Lord," said Mère de la Providence, " we will offer Communion for the Soul in Purgatory most agreeable to Our Lady and perhaps when you are in our chapel Our Blessed Lady will give you light about your Missions," little guessing how literally her words were to be fulfilled ! So on August 4, the anniversary of the death of the saintly Curé d'Ars, the Bishop said his Mass in the chapel and afterwards adjourned to the large Community room to give a little discourse on the Chinese Missions. Glancing round the room he read the familiar words engraved on the walls. " You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you," and on that text he spoke about the crying needs of the poor pagan Chinese and of the great work that was waiting to be done in the East. His words met with a ready response in the hearts of his listeners, who were immediately fired with a great longing to go and help in this great work for God's greater honour and glory. The Bishop was well aware of the thrill that passed over his audience and one novice in particular could not conceal her eagerness. " My child," he said, " you must make every effort to conform your will to God's Will and you must pray much about it." As he was leaving he said

to Mère de la Providence, "Do you know for what intention I said my Mass? I came here to seek helpers amongst the Helpers," and as the Mother General remained silent he continued: "Are you going to be Helpers only in a small corner of the world?" "Oh, no, my Lord," she answered quickly, "throughout the whole Universe."

On his return to the rue de Sèvres, Mgr. Languillat discussed the question with the Provincial who, that very morning, when saying his Office, had the deep conviction that the Helpers of the Holy Souls should accept the Chinese Missions. The fact of the same thought coming to both of them independently pointed to more than mere coincidence, and the two priests went together to the convent that same afternoon. After the usual salutation there was an awkward pause—the Mother General looked from one to the other, waiting to hear the reason of this unexpected visit. At last Père de Ponlevoy told her of his experience that morning and of his firm belief that her Society was called to China. Mère de la Providence listened in some perturbation of mind. She had already refused several requests for new foundations in France, how could she send her daughters to this far off Mission field? It seemed impossible. There was silence in the room for a few seconds and then she said quietly: "I hope to be obedient even unto death, and if I am convinced that it is God's Will for us to go to China I will say 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.'"

The whole Community again assembled in the large room, feeling no doubt that some momentous decision

House from Garden, Zi-ka-wei

Chapel, Zi-ka-wei, near Shanghai

was about to be taken. His Lordship began by saying the *Ave Maria* in Chinese : " Is not this a sweet language ? does it not sound pleasant in your ears ? " Then it suddenly dawned on them all that the Bishop had come with a very definite purpose. He looked round the room and then said very deliberately : " Are there any vocations here for China ? " He saw many pairs of eyes glowing with excitement. " Very well," he said, " let those who would like to go hold up their hands." Without the slightest hesitation twenty-five or thirty hands were enthusiastically raised—in fact, had their wishes been consulted the Mother House would apparently have been depleted. The Mother General was so touched with this spontaneous demonstration that she could hardly control her voice . . . " Dear children," she said, " let all those stand up who are convinced before God that they are called to China," and almost the entire Community rose to their feet ! " God be praised," said Père de Ponlevoy, as he and the Bishop withdrew.

Mère de la Providence was too wise to be guided in this grave decision by what might be merely a passing wave of enthusiasm and insisted on an account in writing of the date of each one's desire for missionary work and the reasons that had led her to respond so generously to the Bishop's appeal. When Nantes heard the great news there was the same enthusiasm. " My dear daughter," wrote the Foundress to Mère du Sacré Cœur, " What a shock I have just received ! Guess if you can ! What faith and love my dear children possess ! This outburst of enthusiasm has

touched me deeply. Further details to-morrow, for the post is just leaving. Oh, what a week, what a day, what an hour ! Anniversary of the death of the dear Curé d'Ars. This is the outcome of the Portiuncula Indulgence our Sisters say. We can only add : 'Lovingly divine and merciful election'."

Letters poured in. Mère du Sacré Cœur was one of the first to offer herself. " I have loved the Missions all my life," she wrote, " and since I became a religious I have been convinced that, sooner or later, according to the Constitutions, we should be called to the Missions. Last year you told me not to think about it any more, and so I did not mention it again and even thought I had put it out of my mind, but present events have proved that my head and my heart have been full of it. My only motive in asking to go to China is to fulfil what I believe to be the Will of God. No other consideration has any effect upon me."

As it happened, however, there was a certain treasured letter bearing the Shanghai postmark which had been read and re-read during the past year and perhaps unconsciously had influenced her decision, for in it Père Basuiau confessed that he had sometimes dreamt of a convent of the Helpers of the Holy Souls in the celestial Empire and wrote : " If we had nuns here vocations would not be wanting."

A young novice, Mère St. Paul, whose one regret in entering the Society had been the supposed abandonment of a long cherished desire for missionary life, was filled with intense happiness by the Bishop's unexpected appeal and the possible realization of her

Chapel at St. Joseph's Institution, Shanghai, China

hopes. " I have given up so little," she wrote to Mother General, " and I am receiving even here more than a hundredfold. I really wish to suffer in some way. I have cost Our Lord so much, I must give Him souls and it is in the Mission fields that I have most hope of gathering them in. The Society gives me everything for soul and body. If it be necessary to suffer privations, illness, even death in order to establish it elsewhere, dear Reverend Mother, do grant me this great favour."

Meanwhile, the Mother General was weighing all the reasons for and against this new undertaking, which had been, as it were, sent her by Divine Providence. The chief objections were of course the lack of subjects and of necessary funds, and the dread lest her daughters' generous enthusiasm was not founded on sufficient consideration. Moreover, the Bishop wanted the missionaries to go in twos and threes which might be detrimental to their so recently acquired religious training. On the other hand, what an untold benefit to the Holy Souls would be the sufferings and sacrifices awaiting their Helpers in the Far East where a rich harvest of souls might be gathered into the granaries of the Lord.

Neither could Mère de la Providence ignore the remarkable and spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm from the Community nor the attraction to the Foreign Missions long felt by her eldest daughter, Mère du Sacré Cœur. " I am not in the least surprised at your great joy," Mère de la Providence wrote, " in fact, I should be astonished were it otherwise. Prepare

yourself for the sacrifice of remaining here or of going to the East." Nothing could be definitely settled until Père Olivaint came out of retreat and gave his opinion on this momentous question. As soon as he heard the reasons for and against he agreed absolutely with Père de Ponlevoy that Almighty God was truly calling the Society to China, although he wished Mère de la Providence to have all the merit of the decision. On August 27 the Mother General wrote the following letter to the Bishop definitely accepting the Chinese Missions :

" My Lord, I have been hoping each day to hear of your return to Paris, but as you are prolonging your stay I am writing at once to tell you Père Olivaint's opinion regarding this great project which is occupying all our thoughts. He agrees absolutely with Father Provincial. They both tell me that God's Will is calling us to China. Therefore, acting on the advice of these two authorities, I accept the proposal that has been made to me by Père de Ponlevoy. You have been chosen by the Sacred Heart of Jesus to give the Helpers the grace of the Missions, a grace that entails suffering and a more complete self-immolation, but which will also be more effectual for the relief and deliverance of the Souls in Purgatory, the object of our Institute. It remains now to settle with you the details of time, etc., which are the outcome of this resolution taken before the Tabernacle. It was on August 13, the last day of the Novena to the Holy Ghost and the

Feast of St. Hippolytus (patron of Mgr. Languillat and of Père Basuiau) that I was able to see Père Olivaint and Father Provincial. Now that our little Society has become yours, my Lord, we long to see you amongst us. You have said, ' There are 3,000 women waiting for you in China, go and teach them how to pray.' We are looking forward eagerly to seeing you. Deign to bless your new family, my Lord."

The day after writing this letter, the Mother General arranged that the first missionaries should sail in October or November. Although it was not announced who should lead them, there could have been but little doubt the choice would fall on the Superior of Nantes. The Mother General wrote to Mère du Sacré Cœur early in September, advising her to prepare her relations for her possible departure. " Unite yourself intimately with Our Lord so that if He grants you the grace of the Apostolate in China you may be able to establish firmly our beloved Institute there, together with devotion to the Holy Souls, and that you may preserve as far as possible the customs and works of the Institute. Above all, we want to find religious vocations amongst the Chinese women, who can undertake Chinese works, so that we ourselves may not be dispersed, but remain in Community." This letter was equivalent to a favourable decision and brought great joy to Mère du Sacré Cœur, whose heart was so completely at one with her beloved Mother General.

Early in September the Community went into retreat, when five professed nuns made their perpetual vows and three novices made their first vows. Amongst these novices was Mère St. Paul who had the unique privilege of making her vows a few weeks before the appointed time so that she would be able to start for China in the following October. Her strong attraction to the Missions was so obviously supernatural that the Mother General could not but give her consent. When the Community met together at the end of the retreat to congratulate those who had just taken their final vows Mère de la Providence announced: "The matter is settled, we are going to China; I have written for the berths." The announcement was greeted with much joy. On Our Lady's birthday came the unwelcome news that only two berths could be reserved in the boat leaving in October; the remaining four Missionaries must wait until November. The two pioneers were to be Mère du Sacré Cœur and the happy young Mère St. Paul. "Deep emotion takes possession of me," wrote Mère de la Providence to Mère du Sacré Cœur on September 13, "and yet the good God does all for us. I called at the Convent of St. Maur and saw the holy Superior from Singapore. She is truly charming and will be your good angel on the voyage; it is a great blessing. We will consecrate the Mission to the Sacred Heart."

How easily one can understand her feelings and the tears that rose to her eyes so often during these days, for a mother does not part with beloved daughters without an aching heart. "If I had refused China,"

she confided to Mère du Sacré Cœur, " I should have regretted it to my dying day. I have accepted it and we must rise above all difficulties and heart-rendings." Letters poured in from all her most influential friends, priests and bishops, including the Abbé Toccanier on whom had partly fallen the mantle of his venerated Curé. The one gleam of comfort in her grief was the thought that Père Basuiau was waiting to welcome the little flock and they would not be orphans. On September 17, Mère de la Providence wrote to him, " Our Lord said to His Apostles ' You have not chosen Me but I have chosen you,' and He seems to be saying now to me, ' You have not chosen China, but I have given it to you.' The Holy Souls are again confiding their Helpers to your care. What a mystery it all is ! I scarcely know what happened to us all on August 4. I can only go on repeating ' Ecce ancilla Domini,' but quite calmly without the least pleasure or enthusiasm. My Director said : ' It is God's Will,' so what could I say but ' Fiat ' ? I felt that my ' Fiat ' created the Mission." After naming the two who had been chosen for the Mission she continued : " We are making a tremendous sacrifice in sending you these subjects. You write to me : ' We must let the dear Master sacrifice the victim entirely at His own convenience.' Are you a prophet ? It is indeed Abraham sacrificing Isaac, but God wills it, so everyone tells me, and circumstances all point that way. I have said that we do not possess a farthing, but Father Provincial replied that the Mission would see to that." She then proceeded to tell him what had been

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decided. The Helpers were to keep their distinctive costume but of a lighter material. Their object was to find vocations amongst the Chinese and give them a religious formation. She asked Père Basuiau to undertake the installation of the new Community. "Au revoir, Father," she said in conclusion, "the next boat will bring you your daughters. O Father, what a sacrifice! What a separation! Pray for us. When you are reading these words I shall be without any news of these dear children, and God alone knows what a cross that will be. I have not strength enough even to think of it. *Stabat Mater.* Pray for your children, dear Father. I rely on you. You will be father and mother to them, in the Heart of Jesus."

Meanwhile, Mère du Sacré Cœur was preparing her relations for her departure, and wrote a few days before leaving Nantes to her mother, Madame Lardin: "There are grave matters pending, for it seems certain that we are going to make a foundation in the Missions. You know well my love for the Propagation of the Faith and how much I have always longed to work for the conversion of the heathen. I may perhaps be granted this great happiness for which I have asked, but I doubt if we shall have any definite answer until after the retreat. As travelling is now so easy we shall probably go for a time so as to train religious amongst the Chinese women. It will be a great joy to me. You see how much we are in need of prayers just now. Poor mother! Two of your children will be in distant lands for some time (her brother Charles had just gone to America). These two sacrifices will weigh

heavily in the scales of Almighty God. I would dearly love to deposit in your heart some of the confidence that is in mine. We shall have given everything to Our Lord in this short life, and He, in His Infinite Goodness, will give us everything in Eternity."

Mère du Sacré Cœur arrived in Paris on September 25 and told the Foundress that their friends in Nantes did not approve of the grave decision she had taken. "I was expecting that," said Mother General, "I am even prepared to hear it said of me 'she is mad,' just as they said at the rue St. Martin. But I have the approval of all those who have the grace to advise me, and what more can I want?"

There was, however, one approval which she wanted very much indeed. No important step had ever been taken without the Holy Father's blessing, and in answer to her request the Pope wrote with his own hand:

> "Angelus Raphael comitetur vos in via et Dominus vos benedicat et dirigat.
>
> "Pius P.P. IX. Die 5 Octobris, 1867."

This blessing of the Holy Father arrived at the rue de la Barouillère on October 14. (That of the Archbishop of Paris had preceded it.) Bishop Languillat had said his Mass at the Convent that morning and addressed a few words to the Community with which henceforth he was to be so closely associated. When saying good-bye to the Reverend Mother he remarked: "If you want to preserve your unity you must have everything at Shanghai exactly the same as you have

here." This coincided with the Foundress's own opinion.

On October 14 (the eve of the departure), Père Olivaint said Mass and inflamed all hearts by a fervent exhortation on apostolic zeal. Later in the day, the two missionaries had the honour of being received by the Papal Nuncio, who blessed and encouraged their enterprise. A little family fête had been prepared in honour of the new apostles and it was in truth a very banquet of charity. Every delicate attention that maternal and fraternal affection can devise, all that the tenderness of Divine Love grafts upon human love, was poured forth on the dear travellers. The pang of parting was, of course, deeply felt, but illumined by the celestial joy of sacrifice. Mère du Sacré-Cœur was radiant with happiness, while the eyes of Mère St. Paul, in spite of her ardent enthusiasm, were dimmed with ill-concealed tears. It was as might be expected ; suffering had led the first to complete death of self, the other was only just beginning to understand that mystery. Both were on fire with the love of Christ. None better than Mère du Sacré-Cœur could mould to the Divine Resemblance the natural grace and charm of her youthful companion, and develop the possibilities hidden in her generous soul. In Mère du Sacré-Cœur God had given Mère St. Paul the model of religious perfection ; she had but to correspond to grace and abandon herself to that guidance. Mère du Sacré-Cœur bore truly within her the Christ she was to show forth to others ; He was hers, wholly hers, yet she understood that He was HERS for OTHERS.

Mère de la Providence accompanied the travellers to the station, a precedent always maintained for the Chinese missionaries. On the way a thousand sweet memories were evoked of joys and sorrows shared, of all that happened since the eventful night when a poor, tired postulant had thrown herself into the outstretched arms of her spiritual mother and aroused that maternal love which had never since failed her. In a contest of humility these two noble souls now begged each other's pardon for any shortcomings during those arduous years. At the mention of the word, Mère St. Paul was on her knees in the cab : " Oh, Mother dear, I am the only one here who ought to beg pardon, and I do so now with all my heart." But neither would the older religious dispense themselves from this act of humility, although, when the Mother General knelt down, Mère du Sacré Cœur was fain to turn away and look out of the window lest her self-control should completely break down.

When the Dames de St. Maur and the Helpers were settled in the compartment reserved for them Mère St. Paul suddenly exclaimed through her tears : " Dearest Mother, if it were not for the love of God I could never leave you. Give me your ring for a moment." The Mother Foundress slipped her ring on to her daughter's finger repeating the formula of words used in the vows : " My child, do you really wish for this union with the Divine Master, at the cost of this journey to China ? " " Yes, Mother, I want it at all costs," said the young religious, whose whole life has proved the sincerity of her words. Then the bell rang and the train

glided slowly out of the station. The Mother General stood until her tear-dimmed eyes could no longer see the handkerchiefs waving from the window. Instinctively she wended her way to Our Lady of Victories, that hallowed spot where comfort and strength had come to help her through many a crisis in her life. She knelt there in fervent prayer. "I hardly knew what I was saying," she wrote afterwards. "I began prayers which I could not finish. I repeated endless ejaculations. 'My dear Mother, I implore you to protect them. Holy Virgin Mary, I trust them to your care.' I did not leave her blessed Sanctuary until I felt strengthened."

The travellers embarked at Marseilles on October 19, on the same ship that had carried Père Basuiau two years before. They travelled in goodly company: the passengers included a Jesuit Archbishop bound for Bombay, three Bishops, two Jesuit Fathers and several nuns.

Had Our Lord not told Mère de la Providence that Père Basuiau would be given back to her without any human intervention? Who could have guessed that, in two short years, he would be waiting to welcome the Helpers of the Holy Souls to China!

Chapter XII

FAILING HEALTH

THE year 1868 passed by uneventfully at the rue de la Barouillère. The arrival of the Chinese mail was always a red-letter day in the annals of the Community; every detail in the life of the missionaries was followed with absorbing interest, especially the warm welcome from the Chinese and the meeting with Père Basuiau, who remained the same kind father in spite of his shaven head, long pig-tail, and Chinese dress. In November, 1868, a third departure of missionaries took place from the Mother House. Two Mothers, St. Vincent and St. Lucy, and two Sisters, St. Teresa and St. Bernard, sailed for Shanghai. A little band of Carmelites had hoped to make the voyage to China in their company, but were obliged to abandon the project and wait until the following month. As they had to pass through Paris Mère de la Providence sent them a cordial invitation to stay at the rue de la Barouillère before setting out on their long journey. All that her motherly heart could devise was affectionately prepared to welcome these daughters of St. Teresa. The visitors shared the Community meals and laughed merrily over their awkwardness at table, for Mother Prioress had not used a fork for fifteen years. The recreation hour

passed so quickly that when the bell rang it was difficult to check the flow of lively conversation. The holy Carmelites could scarcely express their gratitude for the Mother Foundress's kind hospitality. "We are your daughters," they cried. "We will obey you and carry out all your wishes." The eve of their departure was celebrated by a little festival in the Community room, where a statue of St. Teresa stood on a rock spread over with Chinese and Carmelites, and lower down some Helpers surrounded with women sang hymns of praise. The visitors were profoundly touched by this exhibition of sisterly charity, and the Mother Prioress clasped the hand of Mère de la Providence as they sat side by side. The following morning, the Mother General escorted the Carmelites to the station and hurried them into their reserved carriage, to avoid the gaze of the bystanders whose curiosity was aroused by the unusual sight of four Carmelites on the crowded platform.

Whilst the Society was developing in China the two houses in France continued to pray, suffer, and labour for the Holy Souls, and to attract other generous hearts animated by a like devotion. Numerous requests came for new foundations at Liège, Naples, even Algiers, and New York, but the Foundress had to refuse them all.

On May 30, 1869, a great privilege was obtained for the Mother house—that of having the Blessed Sacrament exposed during the Octave of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, and later on this privilege was extended to all the other houses of the Institute.

The health of Mère de la Providence, never very robust, was by this time causing grave anxiety. Severe attacks of pain sometimes reduced her to a state of utter exhaustion, and when she was able again to resume her usual life, it was seen that every attack left her a little weaker; still she continued to direct her ever-increasing family, write her journal and attend to her large correspondence, and only her director knew that, underneath the cheerful smile and kindly word, lay a weight of suffering that seemed to crush her to the ground. "How could she ever face the difficulties of her task?" she asked herself. "Have great confidence," said Père Olivaint, "we are told that St. Francis Xavier's ship could not come to grief; it will be the same for you—nothing is at a standstill in your work, since you are fulfilling the will of God!" It seems strange that even now no one suspected the nature or gravity of her complaint. As soon as she recovered from her attacks of pain she took up again all her onerous duties. On February 13 she wrote: "I have not had one moment to myself. After my Communion in the Oratory I looked through my letters, and wrote to all our sisters in China (ten letters in all), then to two Chinese women and to Père Basuiau. So with my spiritual exercises the whole day is occupied. I hardly know how to say my 'Fiat,' and yet I suffer intensely."

Her sufferings never caused the Foundress to neglect the interests of her Society. Père Olivaint had once said to her, "When you have three houses you must begin to think of a formal approbation."

Paris, Nantes, and Sen-mou-yeu were now securely established, and the Mother General proceeded to write to every Bishop who knew the Society, asking for testimonials to support her appeal at Rome. Her energy knew no bounds, she literally wore herself out with this voluminous correspondence. Amongst the forty Bishops who certified to the merits of the Society, none wrote in more glowing terms than the Bishop of Nantes. Père Olivaint wrote to Père Piccirillo who was charged with the important affair in Rome. "Mère de la Providence, Foundress of the Congregation of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, has asked me to send you a word of recommendation, which I have the greatest pleasure in doing, because of her devotion to Our Lord, to the Church, and to our Society. Her congregation lives by our rules, under our direction, and is animated by our spirit. She is very generous, very fervent, and entirely devoted to the relief of the Holy Souls, for which object no other religious order has yet been instituted. This devotion, together with her strong faith, has developed in her a supernatural life which is rare in these days. Although the Congregation has only been in existence for twelve years, the piety and zeal of the nuns have already exercised a very wholesome influence. The Helpers deem it prudent to make every effort to obtain a *Bref Laudatif* before the opening of the Council when the question of Congregations may be discussed. With this end in view, Mère de la Providence implores you to come to her aid and to plead her cause with the Holy Father, and I join my prayers to hers."

All through that spring the Mother General was very ill. Paroxysms of pain swept over her and seemed to drain her strength. "O Jesus, in spite of everything I thank Thee for my sufferings," was her constant cry, and yet no one suspected any serious malady, perhaps because her face had none of the waxen pallor and transparency of an invalid, but retained to the very end some of the freshness and warm colouring of health. Her director persisted in the opinion that her sufferings were supernatural, and sometimes chided her gently for yielding to the overwhelming prostration that followed each fresh attack of agonizing pain. "I cannot bear to see you so broken, write and tell me that you have regained some strength. Confidence! Courage! Jesus!"

But on Easter Monday she was much worse. "You are behind-hand. You ought to have risen again with Our Lord." And he folded up the stations of the Cross which stood open on her writing-table—"My child, it is not the day for that," he said. When the Father had gone, she pondered over his words, "Yes, I want to rejoice in spite of everything." That sentence, "you are behind-hand" had made a great impression on her. "How true," she said, in her deep humility. But although Père Olivaint tried to inspire her and her Community with his own indomitable courage and confidence, he began to fear that these painful and continual attacks pointed to some very serious malady. He accordingly urged her to consult a doctor. An examination resulted in a

verdict that might well have daunted a less generous nature than that of Mère de la Providence. "You want to know my opinion?" said the physician. "Surgery begins where medicine leaves off." She heard this diagnosis quite calmly, making no outward sign of the fear that clutched her heart. She wrote to tell Père Olivaint the result of her act of obedience. A few hours brought the Father's reply, prescribing a more complete self-abandonment to Our Blessed Lord as the best remedy for her ills. "Sursum corda" was his refrain.

On August 26 came the great news that the *Bref Laudatif* had been granted; the physical sufferings of the Foundress were for a moment swallowed up in a great joy. The whole house was *en fête* and all the poor in the neighbourhood received an extra large alms from the visiting Sister. But after this brief respite the pain returned again and the venerable patient was evidently a little hurt at Père Olivaint's apparent indifference to her sufferings. "My child," he remonstrated, "you surely cannot doubt my fatherly affection, and although you say that I take everything so calmly, I have a heart all the same. I cannot feel any serious anxiety about you because I keep saying to myself 'Suffering is her life, Almighty God will send it in some form or other for the sake of the souls in Purgatory. . . .' Have courage, your suffering is supernatural, both in its causes and in its effects! God will comfort and cure you when He thinks fit." In spite of his supreme faith in a miraculous cure, Père Olivaint insisted on another visit to an eminent doctor, who,

after consulting a colleague, pronounced the verdict that Mère de la Providence was suffering from cancer in such an advanced stage that an operation was out of the question. He prescribed a treatment which proved beneficial for a short time, but the Mother General and her daughters, trusting to Divine Providence, began at once a fervent Novena. As time went on she sometimes seemed a little better, and then a worse attack than ever dashed their hopes to the ground. But although no miracle was worked on her poor, tortured body, who can tell the miracles of grace that were worked all unseen in the depths of her soul. "Father, I am thinking about death," she said once to her confessor. "It is an excellent thought for our sanctification," replied Père Olivaint. "But I am so frightened of it now, it seems as if I had done nothing," she said: "We are not saved by our own deeds, but through the merits of Our Lord." "Death appears to me like plunging into the Heart of Jesus, and indeed I do rely on Him." And, although she knew that this could not be far off now, she did not relax any of her duties; in fact her efforts were redoubled as the year drew to a close, her illness was making rapid strides and there was so much she wanted to do before leaving her dear religious family.

Numerous requests for new foundations were constantly arriving, but at Père Olivaint's advice she refused them all. At the beginning of October, however, a Belgian lady wrote that a rich friend of hers would give 100,000 francs towards a new foundation in her own country leaving the choice of the place to

the Mother General. Two Belgian members of the Community were accordingly sent to Malines to consult the Vicar-General, as the Archbishop was then in Rome. The interview was most satisfactory, and the two sisters returned to Paris with great expectations. The Mother General wrote at once to the benefactress and asked her exactly what she proposed to do. On November 15, St. Gertrude's day, the reply came—the lady had never had the slightest intention of contributing towards a new foundation. The Mother General was not disconcerted by this rebuff; for a telegram bringing the Archbishop's approbation, and a letter from Brussels telling of a suitable house, made her feel certain that Divine Providence intended the next convent of the Helpers of the Holy Souls to be established in Brussels. The "suitable house" was to be put up to auction in a few days, so there was no time to be lost. Mère de la Providence was accustomed to quick decisions, and on October 17, Mère St. François de Sales and Mère Marguerite Marie and Mère St. Augustin left for Brussels.

The proposed house was very much out of repair, but as it was situated in the suburb of Scharbeek, and surrounded by a large garden, the Mothers decided to buy it if the price were not exorbitant. As the Archbishop had stipulated that the new Convent should be in a suburb, it certainly seemed as if Divine Providence had marked out this house for them. The sale was postponed till December 8, when the house became the property of the Society for 75,000 francs.

The beginning of a new year was always a peculiarly

Chapel, Brussels

solemn time to Mère de la Providence, but when 1870 dawned, she little knew the storm that was about to burst over her beloved France. She knew well enough that unless some miracle were worked, the devastating cancer would soon eat away her life and she longed to make the most of the short time that remained to her. The last few hours of the old year were spent in excruciating pain, but when morning came she managed to dress herself with the help of one of her daughters. Before leaving her room she knelt for a moment before a statue of the Sacred Heart, but she could not prevent the tears from rising to her eyes. "Oh, Mother, you are crying," said her anxious daughter. "I am thinking of God's goodness, and of His love for souls. This year will be for me a year of great graces, I feel sure of it, but the time is short. . . . Let us make haste to love Our Lord." And then after a few moments' silence "ask that I may be truly imbued with the Love of God," she said. "Oh, if only I could die of love." She lifted her cross to her lips, and then went down to the Chapel. But nothing satisfied her this morning. Had the sacristan forgotten that it was New Year's day, the Feast of the Circumcision? Why was the Altar so poorly decorated? "Where is your love?" she said. "Change those flowers as quickly as you can and put on the freshest you have; is anything too good for God?"

A few days later when she was asked what she intended to do later on. "I really do not know," she said, "God nearly always makes me do the exact opposite to that which I would like to do. I understand

now why ever since 1865 I have been impelled to ask for the grace of detachment." For instance, humanly speaking, she would scarcely have chosen a blind religious for the difficult office of mistress of novices, and yet when Mère de la Miséricorde begged to be relieved of this onerous post, her choice fell on Mère St. François de Borgia, although Père Olivant deemed her blindness somewhat an obstacle.

January 7 was the date fixed for the departure of Mère St. François de Sales for Brussels, and as the day drew near, the Mother General's heart ached sorely : " Yet another departure. My God, Thou alone knowest what it costs, but the fulfilment of Thy Will is more precious to me than aught else. Moreover, we belong to Eternity, I feel that now more than ever."

On January 6 Mère de la Providence was too ill to leave her bed, and there was no question of her being able to accompany her daughters to Brussels as she longed to do. " It is only right that I should pay for the Brussels foundation ; it is to be a house of blessings. Our Lord will grant that instead of my asked-for cure. This miserable framework must soon fall to pieces in the natural order of things ! A Helper must expect to suffer, and she above all others should long for it. But we are so cowardly, so cowardly—at least, I am." The next day she was just able to drag herself downstairs to see the last of her daughters, who could not conceal their sorrow at parting with this beloved Mother, on whom was already laid the finger of Death. " Come, come, my dear children," she said

Rome

Novitiate House, Belgium

as she embraced them one by one, " we must be brave. Jesus is with us. I trust you all to His gracious keeping. We must be true religious, and, above all, we must love our life of sacrifice, for that is what makes saints." And as they were saying " Good-bye " she cried out cheerfully : " No, not good-bye, just *au revoir*. We are never really separated since we are always meeting in the Heart of Jesus." The next day, in accordance with God's merciful designs, she must needs pay for this foundation by a fresh attack of agonizing pain, which kept her in bed, and deprived her for some days of Mass and Holy Communion. Her chief consolation came from Brussels, numerous kind friends and benefactors had showered gifts of all kinds on the new foundation, and on February 2 the first Mass was celebrated in the small Community Chapel.

Mère de la Providence had prophesied that 1870 was to be a year of " great graces " for her ; if by " great graces " she meant " great sufferings," her prophecy was certainly fulfilled. She had barely recovered from the parting with her Belgian daughters when news came from Lille that her beloved father had died on February 9 full of years and merits. The rule would have allowed her to assist him in his last moments, but since God had ordained otherwise, she was content. Père Olivaint wrote : " Do not be in too great a hurry to join your father in Heaven. Your mission is not finished. Courage and confidence—Jesus and always Jesus. I send you a fatherly blessing." When he called next day to offer his sympathy

for her bereavement he was struck by her attitude of complete abandonment to God's will. "My child, this state of mind is excellent. It is a proof that God has taken complete possession of the inner stronghold of your will." "Yes, Father," she replied simply, "I seem to have but one wish now, to do God's will. Since God did not wish it I felt incapable of desiring to see my father again." Her filial love supernaturalized and enlarged by her vocation found consolation in prayer. "How strongly I feel that I am truly the Helper of my father's soul," she said as she begged for prayers for her beloved dead, and gently and tenderly she tried to fill her mother's heart with some of her own calm resignation. "Do not let us grieve like those who have no hope," she wrote to her. It is but meet that the divine hope of immortality that illumines the soul of every true Christian should shine more radiantly in the soul of a Helper.

Two months later Mère de la Providence was kneeling at the death bed of a young novice and receiving her vows. "Dear child," she whispered, tenderly, "Jesus is here, He has come for you" little Sister St. Adrian did not keep him waiting.

It was heart-rending to watch the rapid progress of the fatal disease, and the heroism with which the sufferer bore the paroxysms of pain. In the hour of her deepest agony, her eyes would rest lovingly on her crucifix. "What are my sufferings compared with His! O patient Jesus, have mercy on me." Once her nurse remarked that her patience must deliver many souls from Purgatory every day. "Do not

speak to me about my patience, you will make me weep, I have neither patience nor courage, I have only just enough strength to say my 'Fiat'." By this time she could not even walk without help. One day, when she was making a great effort to reach the Chapel for Mass, supported by two of her daughters, "I want so much to love You, dear Lord," she said, "so much that I am dying of love," and then, as her breathing became more and more laboured, she added with her own quick smile, "but I shall probably die of suffocation." There was another struggle for breath, and then her daughters heard the whisper, "Dear Master, you know that my 'Fiat' covers everything."

There were days when the fervent prayers seemed to have wrought some improvement, though never for long. During one of these interludes the doctor recommended a little drive. Very reluctantly she dressed, and went down to the Chapel for a few moments until the carriage came. Her ever-watchful daughters noticed the troubled look in her eyes, and thinking the pain had returned, one of them said: "Are you suffering very much?" "Yes, there will not be many more of these outings," and then she seemed to reproach herself and added hastily: "To-morrow does not belong to us, why fear the future?"

Everyone had hoped that this little expedition, after so many weeks indoors, would restore her spirits, but she sat very quietly as the carriage proceeded through the crowded streets. "No, I am afraid to talk," she

said to her companion, " Paris makes me feel so sad. Let us say the rosary for all the passers-by; poor souls, how few there are amongst these crowds who give a thought to Eternity. O my God, how little Thou art loved ! "

The House at Liège

Chapter XIII

THE LAST DAYS OF MÈRE MARIE DE LA PROVIDENCE.

ON July 15, 1870, war was declared between France and Germany ; the troops were mobilized and all Paris was astir. The parlours of the Convent were filled with fathers and brothers who had come to say good-bye before joining their regiments. One of the novices, Sœur St. Jean de la Croix, knew nothing of the declaration of war, and her first intimation of the fact was a hasty summons to the parlour when her agitated brother throwing himself into her arms said : " I have been to confession and now I am off to the Front." The poor little sister was completely overcome as she said good-bye to him. It was for the last time ; the young man was killed soon afterwards at Reichshoffen. Once more Mère de la Providence's spirit of Faith shone in an admirable manner. She rejoiced to see the action of God even in allowing this state of war, if only it made men better understand their position in Creation ! On January 18, it was ordained that for the duration of the war, during the evening visit to the Blessed Sacrament, a *De Profundis* be said for all who had been killed during the day and a decade of the Rosary for all the bereaved.

In a letter to the Superior at Brussels she wrote :

" Yes, we are at war ; what can we do but be patient and not worry ? Let us both resolve not to miss the post and to answer letters within twenty-four hours, so that if no answer comes we may know that communications have been interrupted. Patience—let us be more united than ever."

Unceasing prayers had been offered for the Mother General's cure. One novena after another was made with hopeful confidence, but the dread malady continued slowly but surely to undermine this life which was so precious to them all. However, in spite of former failures, a new novena was begun with redoubled fervour at the end of July. The dear invalid had resigned herself completely to God's Will, but she was too wholesomely human not to long for a return of health and strength that she might work yet more for the honour and glory of God. " Patience until August 2," she wrote to the Superior at Brussels, "and I shall be cured." And again on July 31 : " I pray that St. Ignatius may say to you all that I would like to say myself. Cure me next Thursday and then I shall be able to write to you my dearest daughter ; to-day it is impossible, the torture increases with each novena. Pray that I may be brave and patient."

But August 2 came and went, and brought no relief to Mère de la Providence. God wanted her sufferings more than her works, and who can tell the rich graces that were thereby showered down on her and on her spiritual family. Her pain was in itself perhaps the richest grace of all—a mysterious gift which made her life a long drawn-out agony for the deliverance of

countless Souls in Purgatory. Lying helpless on her bed, unable to lift a finger to help her beloved country through this terrible ordeal of war, she had the supreme satisfaction of offering her sufferings for the fallen soldiers.

The war news was far from reassuring; the Germans were closing in on Paris and a siege with its attendant evils of famine and pestilence was imminent. The Community at the rue de la Baroullère now numbered sixty-five, and the food question might any day become acute. Would it not be wiser to send the novices back to their homes? Père Olivaint settled the question in his usual emphatic way: "Send the novices away?—but that means killing the future. I would keep them at all costs even if I had to live on dry crusts. Perhaps I am putting it a little too strongly, but I certainly would not send the novices away unless it were absolutely impossible to do otherwise, and even so I would act on the same principle as sailors in a storm who lighten the vessel first of all by throwing overboard the least valuable cargo. But consider the question before God. Confidence, courage! Do not read Jeremiah any more, but rather the 2nd and 3rd Psalms in Compline. Our Lord is here and so very much here that you are only suffering for Him and in His Love. Oh, do not lose, either for yourself or for the Holy Souls, the inestimable fruit of sufferings." However a fortnight later the Father came himself to urge the speedy departure of the novices—not to their own homes, but to Nantes and Brussels. Events had developed rapidly and it might very soon be quite impossible to leave Paris at all.

On August 27, nine novices left for Nantes, each one treasuring in her heart the farewell words of her beloved Mother, whose example inspired them all with courage of sacrifice. The remaining novices were the to leave for Brussels early the following morning, but, owing to the confusion at the station, they missed their train. About 9.30 a.m., Mère St. Augustin, who had conducted them to the station, returned looking pale with fatigue and anxiety and went straight to the Mother General's room. The Mother's quick eye took in the situation at once. " I am sure they have not gone. Where are they ? " " One of the Associates who lives close to the station has taken them in until the afternoon train goes." " How could you leave those poor, unhappy children alone for half a day with an utter stranger ? " and Mère de la Providence hastily rang the bell for the portress and said that Mère St. François Xavier must go at once and bring the novices back. So they returned triumphantly ! " Oh, Mother, it is a hundred years since I saw you ! " one novice exclaimed who was overjoyed that Providence had given them all a few more hours with their beloved Mother. Then the dinner-bell rang and she managed to reach the Refectory and give the *Deo Gratias*, but the emotions of the morning had been too much for her and she had to retire to her room. When the novices had all gone the house seemed strangely quiet and empty to those left behind.

Amidst her many pre-occupations Mère de la Providence never lost sight of the general interests of the Society. The Abbé Richard, Superior of the House

Chapel, Turin

Chapel, Florence

at Nantes, had just been elected Bishop of Belley. She accordingly asked Mgr. Fournier, Bishop of Nantes, to undertake the duties which the Abbé Richard had perforce to relinquish. On August 26, His Lordship replied : " The good spirit which animates your sisters, the harmony that pervades your house in Paris, and my firm conviction that your Institute will continue on the same lines in which you have hitherto conducted it, has made me decide to take you as my spiritual children. May the father be worthy of such children ! "

On August 25, Mgr. Languillat said Mass in the Community Chapel and, during an interview afterwards with Mère de la Providence, he asked if she would make an exception to her rule and allow her daughters in China to undertake teaching as he would otherwise be obliged to appeal to some other Congregation. The Mother General held a Council on the matter and consented. The news from the dear missionaries in China was very disquieting. The smouldering hatred of the natives for the foreigner suddenly blazed up, and in June, 1870, there was a massacre of Christians at Tient-Sin, including the Consul and his family and ten Sisters of Charity at the Hospital. Mère du Sacré Cœur, acting under the advice of Father Rector, sent home many novices and orphans, and at the end of July the Mothers were obliged to seek shelter with some Sisters of Charity at Shanghai. The danger soon passed, and the Helpers were able to return, much to the joy of the orphans and villagers to whom they had endeared themselves.

It was not for many long months that Mère de la Providence heard of their safety, for when the good news came Paris was in a state of siege.

Many attempts were made in the early days of September to persuade the Mother General to go to Brussels, but Divine Providence settled the question, for she was far too ill and weak to undertake such a journey ; moreover, she would have hesitated to add to the burdens of this new Foundation, which was living literally from hand to mouth, trusting blindly as usual to Providence for the bare necessaries of existence. She wrote to the Superior of Brussels, recommending the strictest economy : " We are ruined. This anxiety about money in addition to all my other troubles is very hard to bear. Lay in stores while there is time, do not wait until everything deteriorates and is dearer . . . we will pay when this horrible war is over. . . . The Belgian Sisters must on no account be sent back to their families unless you are quite destitute. Père Olivaint says it is better to eat dry crusts and keep our novices. Providence is always watching over us. Many thanks for your dear letters. We must cast ourselves into the Heart of Jesus, our only safeguard ! Let us pray for the Chinese mission. I hardly dare to think of it at all, but the Will of Jesus is all that matters to us. But where are those 100,000 francs you ask for ? I send you a 100,000 blessings instead, and I am, in imagination, already resting in that nice white bed you have so lovingly prepared for me. Tell St. Joseph that you no longer have permission to touch the workmen's money."

The following day she wrote again enclosing an extract from the Hymn used at the ceremony of the First Vows. " If it be Thy will, I will go from door to door begging my daily bread." And for the benefit of the novices she wrote underneath : " It is so much easier to sing these words than to put them into practice, my dear children, but we must all have the virtue of Holy Poverty. I send you each a big blessing. Above all, do not be anxious about my health. It is in God's Hands and He will support me. Let us rejoice in the cross for love of Our Lord."

A few days later communications were cut—Paris was in a state of siege and the Red Cross flag flying outside the Convent showed that the house had been converted into a municipal ambulance. So thoroughly had the Helpers of the Holy Souls thrown themselves into this new work of charity that the Abbé Roquette thought the inscription " Model Ambulance " would describe it more accurately. The beds from the noviceship were all moved into the largest dormitories and the whole house converted into a hospital. The sisters were indefatigable in their labours and spent their recreations in making bandages and lint ; the only corner of the house that escaped invasion was the little chapel where Our Lord remained in the Tabernacle ever consoling and strengthening all who were weary and heavily laden.

The first band of starving refugees arrived soon, and were followed later by wounded soldiers who were warmly welcomed and nursed back to health by skilful nurses who never lost sight of the spiritual

needs of these stricken men. Owing to a friendly butcher their food supplies were at first quite plentiful, but when the butcher was forbidden to deliver meat the sisters had to stand in a long queue outside his shop under the eyes of two National Guards. The irregularity of the post was a great anxiety to the Mother General, who longed for news from her other two houses. Mère St. Gabriel at Nantes was at the head of an ambulance of twenty-five beds, which she managed with admirable tact, combining the qualities of a skilful nurse and a perfect religious and gaining the confidence of the doctors and patients alike.

At Brussels the Helpers so distinguished themselves for their capable nursing that an eminent doctor asked them to undertake an ambulance close to the firing-line, where they remained for six months tending the wounded and helping many a soul to make its peace with God. The self-sacrificing devotion of her daughters was a great consolation to Mère de la Providence, who longed to be able to spend herself in the service of others as in the past. One day she managed to reach the temporary ward and distribute gingerbread to the wounded soldiers, also delighting their hearts by giving them permission to smoke.

Meanwhile, the war continued, and the city was filled with the roar of big guns and bursting shells. Housekeeping for this large establishment was no easy matter. Meat was now strictly rationed ; on October 25 the ration was fifty grammes a head, but the following day it was reduced to thirty grammes, and before the siege was over it was impossible to buy any. Even

horseflesh was an unattainable luxury, and butter cost twenty-seven francs a pound !

The Community had endeared itself to so many that now, in its hour of need, grateful friends came forward to help these Helpers. The Rector of Vaugirard sent meat and vegetables, and the Sacred Heart nuns, who had been fortunate enough to keep their cows, supplied milk, but in November this luxury was stopped as all cows had to be declared.

In October an unusually severe hæmorrhage reduced Mère de la Providence to a state of utter weakness. " Fiat " was ever on her lips, and the thought of her Crucified Lord gave her strength and courage to bear her terrible sufferings.

The Feast of All Saints, 1870, was the seventeenth anniversary of the day when Eugénie Smet was first inspired with the thought of helping the Holy Souls, and it was but fitting that the day should be celebrated by an increase of pain. " If I only had the spirit of Faith," she wrote in her journal, " I should understand better the value of my infirmity. To-day my hands seem to be on fire. Oh, Jesus, I will not even ask Thee to cure me, for I want nothing but Thy Will." But, although she herself celebrated this great Feast with an increase of pain, she was determined that for the household it should be a real feast day. In spite of the rigid rationing a festive lunch was prepared for the wounded soldiers, and each one received from the Mother General a small statue of St. Joseph, for she wanted this day to be one of hallowed memory.

On St. Gertrude's day Mère de la Providence asked

the Abbé Roquette to bless twenty-five loaves of bread destined for the poor ; the good Abbé consented on the condition that he should pay for them. Their charity for the living never made the Helpers forget their beloved Dead ; each hungry client was asked to say a little prayer for the Holy Souls in payment for a loaf. As the year drew to a close, the Mother General grew visibly weaker ; neither prayers nor medical skill could check the steady inexorable growth of the deadly cancer which was consuming her body, but purifying her soul and putting the finishing touches to her celestial crown. Père Olivaint helped and encouraged her as a true father, for he knew that just as the crushed flower gives forth the sweetest perfume so the soul reveals its most sublime beauty when overwhelmed with Jesus in the Garden of the Agony.

In spite of heroic courage and confidence there were times when the weight of suffering overwhelmed her. Her " soul was sorrowful even unto death," and as the Angel came to comfort Our Lord in His agony, so Père Olivaint would come and revive her courage. " He tells me Our Lord will give me hour by hour the necessary strength to bear my state," she wrote. The Father would gently chide her when she accused herself of infidelity : " Your will belongs absolutely to God, your depression is merely the natural consequence of your illness and therefore quite independent of your will. Almighty God has stayed your activity. Believe me," he continued, " you are doing much more in your condition, helpless and consumed with pain, than you did in the past. Jesus was one wound from head

to foot for love of you, and you, my dear child, must bear your cross for love of Him. When you have these terrible hæmorrhages you must say : ' Oh, Jesus, I should have been so glad to shed my blood for Thee . . . I give it to Thee now.' Almighty God Who wanted you all for Himself is leading you according to His Will. You dreaded a wound and He has given you one . . . offer Him your whole being and all your sufferings whatever they may be."

" The Father came on the evening of October 15 to strengthen me," wrote Mère de la Providence in her diary. " ' Confidence ! ' he said, and ' when anyone asks you how you are feeling, take your crucifix and say " Like Him." I am suffering with Him and for Him.' I am constantly praying that you may possess your soul in peace so that you may prevail over your sufferings. You do accept them fundamentally, but you say it ought to be done with more love. If you accept a life of suffering, is it not exactly the same as dying of Love ? "

" I cannot allow you to be afraid of death," he said another time. " I do not know if this illness is mortal, but I forbid you to die without my being present. I do not want you to die regretfully. Death is the call of Jesus as He gathers His child to His Heart. You are quite right not to worry about China, Nantes, Brussels, Our Lord will look after them for you. . . . The longing you have for the Gift of Divine Love proves that you already possess that grace.

Friday, 21. "I have had a terrible day, and far on into the night I kept repeating my ' Fiat.' My God !

my sufferings express my love. Blood of Jesus inebriate me ! I must repeat that invocation because the hæmorrhage began again before Mass. I feel quite worn out. The Father came and found me very ill. ' Jesus was covered with wounds for your sake,' he said. ' You have crucified Him and He is crucifying you by a miracle of mercy. To-day you must offer your sufferings for your own sins, to-morrow for those of your religious family, then for the imprisoned Pope and for France.' But the relief of the Holy Souls is the motive that touches me most of all, because my heart goes out to them. . . . The thought of pleasing Jesus gives me courage to suffer."

Thus did he encourage her with that tenderness of which only strong natures are capable and a true sympathy that never lost sight of the supernatural side of her sufferings. He himself was soon to follow her to the grave, and though he died a martyr to the Faith was she not equally a martyr to suffering, dying by inches, and consumed with the devouring love of God which is the agony of the holiest souls ?

During the Octave of the Holy Souls she had decided not to use a certain absorbent which the Doctor had prescribed for the wound. " No, my child," interposed Père Olivaint, " you must use this remedy, obedience is better than sacrifice." In spite of her weakness, Mère de la Providence had hitherto been able to keep her journal where she recorded any thoughts that helped her or any particularly inspiring words of her director. But this effort was becoming more and more laborious. On November

7 she wrote: "Fiat is always on my lips. I have been recalling to Père Olivaint the principal graces of my life and my daily prayer since 1842 'grant that the Cross may give me love.' For twenty-eight years I have said that prayer without quite knowing what I was asking, and Père Olivaint remarked: 'Eighteen months ago Our Lord gave you His cross which has become more painful the last six months. May the Cross speak to you of His Love! Love to suffer, to suffer unto death—have great confidence. You know that you belong to God entirely; rest in these thoughts." These were the last words she wrote in her journal; her feeble fingers could no longer hold the pen, and the effort of concentrating her mind had become too difficult. Père Olivaint was right; nothing remained to the Mother Foundress but to suffer and to die in union with her Crucified God. "He Who made me is now undoing His handiwork," she remarked to the infirmarian, "He is the Master of all things; moreover, one would never have the courage to inflict such pain on oneself; Almighty God Who knows much better than I the value of suffering, deals it out to me generously."

And "generously" she offered it all up for the Holy Souls. "For the last eighteen years," she said, "I have had no other thought but their deliverance." Every day her sufferings increased; she had asked God not to mind how He treated her—to make Himself at home with her—God took her at her word and she became more and more convinced that this suffering was the greatest grace of her life.

" What a sad feast," someone remarked to her just before Christmas. " For me, no more feasts are possible but those of Eternity," she answered, " I have only to plunge into the Will of God."

As the great Feast of Christmas approached the Community began another fervent novena to Madame Barat, but a violent hæmorrhage made all fear that the end was near ; however, she had not yet quite drained the bitter chalice. Hitherto she had frequently had the intense joy of receiving her dear Lord in Holy Communion, but from Christmas day she was deprived of this consolation, being unable to fast. With Jesus in the Garden of Olives she constantly repeated : " I suffer martyrdom—Lord, that this chalice may pass from me—nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done." From this day she was really participating in the Passion of Jesus Christ—the Passion with all its humiliating sufferings : her body crushed beneath the cross, her soul deprived of the Eucharistic food so needed in her weakness !

The last day of the year was always a solemn time to Mère de la Providence, and she told her daughters to say a *Te Deum* for her intentions. " God has done so much for me and for others too," but the tears welled up in her eyes as she thought of the future—" What will this coming year bring ? " and then, as if reproaching herself for those words she added quickly : " How weak I am ! Blessed be God's most Holy Will for ever."

Already her days were numbered ! But she had still to suffer. On the Feast of the Epiphany it was

announced that the bombardment of Paris was imminent, and on the night of the 7th shells were passing over the house—one fell through the roof and exploded in an empty room.

It was now nearly a fortnight since Mère de la Providence had had the consolation of receiving Holy Communion, and as it was very evident that another hæmorrhage might easily cause her death, it was decided to give her the Last Sacraments. With exquisite delicacy the Rector of the parish, who was also Ecclesiastical Superior of the Community, expressed the wish that Père Olivaint should give the Last Sacraments to the dying Foundress himself. Accordingly on January 8, he heard her confession and announced that he was coming the following morning to administer the last Rites at the request of the parish priest. The invalid heard the welcome news with intense joy. "I feel as if I were preparing for my First Communion or my final vows," she said, "I have never been so happy in my life, I was not expecting this great grace, Our Lord spoils me."

The following morning Mère de la Providence, propped up in her arm-chair, awaited the coming of her Divine Spouse. Her face aglow with eager anticipation bore but little trace of the long months of agony she had endured. At ten o'clock Père Olivaint came into the room wearing the cotta of the Curé d'Ars and bearing his precious burden. He was assisted by the Rector of the parish church and followed by the whole Community.

When he had placed the Blessed Sacrament on the

altar, bright with candles and flowers, he spoke a few words of encouragement to the dying Mother. " You must receive these Sacraments with great confidence and utter self-abandonment, making once more the sacrifice of your life, and making it more completely and entirely than you have ever made it before. But we do not mean to let you go easily, for we are going to wrestle for you with death, and I dare even say with God Himself. We are beginning a novena now." Then turning to the kneeling Community he went on : " My dear Sisters, let us make this novena with unshaken confidence ; since human science can do no more, surely it is the moment for God to manifest His Power," and as his quick ears caught the sound of suppressed sobs in the quiet room he added : " Do not weep, have confidence, say boldly to God ' we *must* keep our Mother '."

He then anointed the Mother General, who with a radiant expression closely followed the whole of this beautiful ceremony. The Father administered the Blessed Eucharist first, saying : " You are about to receive Him from Whom you were separated, for you have been deprived of Communion since Christmas. Holy Church, in her wonderful love has found the means of giving this consolation to her sick children. This is the reason for which we are giving you the Last Sacraments. Yes ! you are to be united again to Him for Whom you have worked so hard and Whom you have loved so deeply. Perhaps He wants to give you the reward of these services at once—though much remains still to be accomplished. Place

Grotto, Brussels

The Calvary in the Garden, Glasgow

yourself in the same dispositions as St. Ignatius, who offered himself to God as a victim, consenting to prolong his exile on earth if he could thereby procure greater glory to God and the salvation of souls. Remember all the sins of your past life and try to feel the deepest contrition for them."

Then followed the touching self-accusation habitual to conventual life : " I ask pardon of God and of the whole Community for any impatience by which I may have hurt anyone and for the bad example I have given by not keeping the Rules with more fidelity." Père Olivaint repeated this humble confession aloud, fearing it might not have been heard by the whole Community.

After she had received Holy Communion a wonderful peace pervaded the room, hallowed by so much suffering. Outside, the great guns were thundering out their message of hatred and malice, but in this quiet sanctuary the King of Peace had come to one valiant subject who had fought the good fight and was soon to receive her everlasting reward.

After her thanksgiving Père Olivaint asked if she had any special instructions to give her daughters. " What ought I to say to them ? " she asked with child-like simplicity. " Say all that you are inspired to say by Him Whom you have just received," answered the Father. " I wish them all to have an ever-increasing zeal for the Souls in Purgatory and a true family spirit. May China, Nantes, Brussels, Paris, be but one heart and one soul." " And all the foundations of the future," added the Father. " Above all else I want them to have charity, charity, charity," continued the

dying Foundress, and the tone of her voice expressed even more than her words that this, the greatest of all virtues, summed up all her ideals. Père Olivaint completed her thought by saying : " Ask that they may have that interior spirit without which no one can be a true religious nor even a true Christian." He asked her to bless her daughters. She had never willingly given a solemn blessing, and it was only when Père Olivaint insisted that the feeble hand was raised to make the sign of the cross over the kneeling Community.

The time of Mother General's deliverance had not yet come. Another month passed in alternating hopes and fears. Novena succeeded novena, but no cure was wrought. The disease had now spread to the throat causing dreadful fits of suffocation, and she begged the infirmarian to allow her to remain in her arm-chair as her breathing was easier in an upright position. One ejaculation was ever on her lips : " I love Thee," but these three words summed up her whole life ! " My God, Thou seest that I can do no more, but I can still tell Thee that I love Thee for all. I love Thee for my present sufferings and for the future I will love Thee until I come to love Thee eternally." One day she said : " Amongst the things that do not offend God there were five I dreaded above everything else and they were—leaving my family—founding a Community—being without the necessary means for my daughters' maintenance—incurring debts—and cancer. By the grace of God these five trials have all come upon me ! "

These last few days of her life, when she was tormented with anxiety about her daughters in China, Nantes, and Brussels, and when the disease she had dreaded most of all was slowly consuming her, surely she drained the bitter chalice to the very dregs ? " This is indeed the Suscipe in practice," she remarked to one of her daughters as she sat in her arm-chair with her crucifix in her hands and *Deo Gratias* on her lips.

On January 28 the guns ceased firing as an armistice had been signed. Each succeeding day found the Mother General a little weaker. " Make haste and become saints whilst you still have your health," she said to her daughters. " Because, when once you are ill, you are reduced to this. I can no longer pray or even listen to prayers, for everything wearies me, but fortunately I can still say ' Fiat.' " Then she asked for what she called her " chloroform "—a rosary which had belonged to the Curé d'Ars on the beads of which she used to repeat " Fiat Jesus."

On February 4 a great change came over her and it was evident that the end was drawing near. The dying Mother had lost all fear of death and was calmly awaiting the last summons from her Beloved. As often happens just before death, the feeble spark of life flickered up again, and when Père Olivaint came the following morning he found her praying and preparing for Holy Communion. A little ray of hope crept into all hearts. Was that long-desired miracle to be worked after all ? Prayers were re-doubled as the Community went one by one to

visit their Mother General. For each of her dear daughters she had a kind word and a sweet smile that brought comfort to each sorrowing heart. A fairly quiet night was followed by an alarming rise of temperature, and the infirmarian doubted if the patient would be able to receive Holy Communion—but "Why do you not prepare the Altar as usual to-day?" said the feeble voice. "You are so tired this morning, dear Mother." "That is all the more reason for receiving Holy Communion. Our Lord is not hard to please, He knows that my sufferings will take the place of preparation and thanksgiving." But the effort of speaking was too much and she sank back on her cushions. When asked if she would not prefer to wait until after Mass, "Why change," she said gently, "I shall not be any better then. Prepare everything quickly and let Our Lord come." And so Our Lord came for the last time to the weary way-worn sufferer who had just strength enough to lift her head as the Sacred Host was given her.

"Two of her daughters remained with her during Mass, reciting at her request the prayers *Suscipe*, *Anima Christi*, *five Paters*, and *five Aves*. At first she was too weak to follow, but hardly had one prayer been finished than she began the next herself. Once she even interrupted by saying: 'Say the prayers more distinctly, I cannot hear you.' All that day she remained motionless in her chair, the least movement brought on terrible fits of suffocation. Not a word of complaint escaped her lips throughout those hours of cruel agony; her angelic sweetness and

patience brought tears to the eyes of all present. Towards evening she was able to listen to the reading of some letters which had just arrived from Brussels and Nantes. The news was all good and through Brussels came consoling letters from China "It is right I should pay for these blessings," she said. Her thoughts were constantly with her absent daughters, and during that last night her fever stricken eyes saw her beloved eldest daughter before her. "So Mère du Sacré Cœur has come back again," she murmured in her wanderings. "How good of her to come to see me. Père Basuiau must have sent her. I am so glad, but how can it be?" and then she went on, "Almighty God has done everything through me, of myself I was utterly incapable of anything." The following morning she awoke after a short sleep and said: "I feel ever so much better," and asked for Holy Communion, saying: "Père Olivaint told me to receive Holy Communion every day." Her sad condition made it impossible to satisfy this longing.

Later in the day she asked if Mère du Sacré Cœur had really returned from China. "If she does not come very soon, she will not find me," she said. For some hours she sat very quiet and silent in her chair, taking little notice of anything that went on around her. Every now and then she whispered: "He will come at three o'clock" (referring to Père Olivaint's expected visit). When the Angelus rang at midday she smiled and said: "See, how feeble I am, I no longer notice what goes on. I thought it was three

o'clock," and she added quietly, " The Father is coming at three o'clock and the room must be nice and tidy." Père Olivaint had not intended coming until half-past five, but obeying some supernatural impulse he advanced his visit and arrived at the Convent precisely at three o'clock. The doctor was leaving the sick room with tears in his eyes, having just said good-bye to his revered patient whom he could not expect to find alive the following morning. No one had told Mère de la Providence of the Father's arrival, but with that wonderful premonition that sometimes comes at the approach of death, she said to those around her : " Go and fetch the Father, he is in the parlour." Père Olivaint stayed with the dying Mother for twenty minutes and did not think her any weaker than the day before, but left instructions to call him if there were any change for the worse. He had not been gone very long before the agony began. The Community gathered in the room where the Mother Superior was saying the prayers for the dying to which the nuns responded as best they could. The murmur of voices mingled with the heavy laboured breathing from the bent figure in the chair . . . then came silence . . . and a whispered *Requiescat in pace* told them that their Mother was dead. It was a quarter past five in the afternoon of February 7 . . . the day when Holy Church commemorates the Prayer of Our Lord in the Garden, " Not as I will but as Thou wilt," which had been the text of this noble life !

A few minutes later Père Olivaint arrived in haste but it was too late—Mère Marie de la Providence had

given back her pure soul to God. He knelt down and said a *De Profundis*. His kind heart was full of compassion for those bereaved children who had lost their Mother, and he longed to comfort them : " What can I say to you in the presence of your dead Foundress whose silence is more eloquent than any speech of mine," he said. " I fain would find in my heart some words of consolation for your desolate souls, for you are young indeed to be left orphans. Let hope, however, dominate your sorrow. God has shortened our Mother's trials only because He did not want to prolong her exile on this earth. I know, my dear Sisters, your only desire is that she should live for ever, and you can make her live again by keeping alive her spirit and her teaching, and by practising exactly the Rules she has left you. Thus will you make your Mother immortal ! Show your gratitude for all her loving care by realizing all her hopes, for you, for the greater glory of God, and for the relief of the Holy Souls."

It was already night when the Community was once more admitted to the death chamber to gaze again on their beloved Mother as she lay on her bed clothed in the habit of her Society. The lines of pain had all been smoothed out of the face which seemed lit by a ray of divine peace, a peace that crept into the hearts of all who knelt beside her couch. A virile courage had lain hid in that " valiant woman's " noble heart, full of compassion and tenderness. It was to her that Père Olivaint applied the words of scripture : *Magno corde animo volenti*—a great heart and a willing mind.

Two days later a vast concourse followed the remains of Mère de la Providence to the cemetery of Montparnasse, where she was laid to rest under the shadow of the cross she had loved so dearly and borne with such unflinching courage.

Holy Rood House, from the Street

Appendix I

THE STORY OF THE LONDON AND NEW YORK FOUNDATIONS

"I HAVE always thought that Our Lord would some day call us to that land consecrated by the blood of so many martyrs, and I cherish the hope that our little Society will eventually be established in the country where heresy has dared to attack the consoling dogma of Purgatory."

Thus did Mère de la Providence write, in February, 1866, in reply to the following urgent appeal from the Bishop of Southwark, for a foundation in his diocese :

"Dear Rev. Mother,

"A Catholic lady has begged the Bishop who now writes to you, to ascertain if it is possible for you to give us hopes that a house of your pious Institute could be founded in a district comprised within the immense diocese of Southwark. . . . This lady thinks that if your nuns could take up their abode near this mission, you would by your suffrages greatly forward our Heavenly Father's kingdom, and save many souls. O ! remember that thousands of Churches have been shut up in this country ; that

our monasteries have been demolished ; that the Souls in Purgatory have lost the numerous foundations for alms and prayers made in Catholic times. The Holy Souls require a perpetual reparation, which will radiate from your convent over the whole of England.

I bless in anticipation your meditations on this letter, and remain, Reverend Mother,

" Your obliged and obedient servant,

" ✠ Thomas Grant."

After much prayer and reflection Mère de la Providence decided that the time had not yet come to cross the English Channel, chiefly because the Foundation of Nantes had exhausted the slender resources of the Community, both as regards subjects and money.

But Bishop Grant of Southwark had also prayed and reflected, and had reached quite a different conclusion, ' After having prayed as you have already done you must think of acting, since suffering is sure to come," wrote his Lordship, hoping to strengthen his appeal by alluding to the Helpers' motto. " We shall certainly have difficulties, but the Holy Souls will overcome them all," and the Bishop proceeded to bless the three foundations of Paris, Nantes, and Battersea, which last was never founded.

The request for a foundation had been made as early as 1860 by Dr. Manning the future Archbishop of Westminster. Three years later, Lady Georgiana Fullerton had called at the rue de la Barouillère to discuss the same project.

However, six years passed without any definite move, although several Helpers began to study English and many influential Catholic ladies in London, headed by Lady Georgiana Fullerton, kept the project well before the public by collecting subscriptions, enrolling honorary members, and arousing the interest of the English Hierarchy.

In November, 1872, Mère du Sacré Cœur, who had succeeded Mère de la Providence, received a letter from Father Drinkwater, parish priest of Battersea, reminding her of his Bishop's former request, and of the hopes which Mère de la Providence had then raised of a future foundation in London.

This letter was followed by another from the Marquise de Salvo :

> " I have not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance, but, having known your revered and deeply regretted Foundress, I venture in the name of Archbishop Manning and of the English ladies who take a lively interest in the work of the Helpers of the Holy Souls to ask you whether you think it would be possible to make a foundation of your Institute in England. It has been long desired, and there is a vast field of work for you here ; pray think of it before God, and give me at least a hope of the realization of our desire. I know very well that so important a work cannot be undertaken in a day, but, if it be God's will, it will succeed. If I mistake not, your venerated Foundress thought often of England and desired to see her great work take root

in English soil. The Marchioness of Lothian begs me to ask you for a novena of Masses for the Souls in Purgatory for this intention, and the Duchess of Norfolk would like to be inscribed as an Hon. Member. If I may ask you for a word of encouragement to transmit to Archbishop Manning, I should be most happy."

The Marchioness of Lothian had already spoken to the Archbishop of Westminster on the subject. " It would be the realization of my most cherished wish," replied His Grace. Such unqualified approval from the Head of the Church in England, together with the promise of financial help from several wealthy lay members, seemed to indicate that the time had come to carry out the Mother Foundress's expressed wish.

The novena of Masses for Lady Lothian's intention concluded on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and then English lessons were begun in the juniorship. Meanwhile, Lady Lothian lost no time in seeking the approval of various Bishops in England and Scotland, from whom she received a hearty response. An appeal was also made in the leading Catholic papers signed by numerous Bishops, Jesuits, secular priests, and distinguished lay folk. A letter from Archbishop Manning headed the appeal :

" I heartily rejoice that the hope which I have entertained of seeing a house of the Helpers of the Holy Souls founded in this diocese, may be now regarded as fulfilled. The Community on their

Holy Rood Chapel

part are willing to come among us, and it remains only for us to assist them with the necessary means.

" The presence of the Helpers of the Holy Souls among us will not only bring to us the help of their devoted charity among our poor, but will also, I trust, powerfully renew our charity and our intercessions for those who are departed.

" I earnestly commend this appeal to the piety of the Faithful.

" ✠ Henry Edward,
" Archbishop of Westminster.
" January 13, 1873."

This public mark of approval from the Archbishop of Westminster supported by almost the entire English Hierarchy, cleared away the last remaining doubt in the Mother General's mind ; she knew now that, at all costs, this foundation was to be.

Events moved rapidly, and early in January Lady Lothian wrote saying that she had discovered a small house which seemed suitable, in a central part of London, in Queen Anne Street, close to Cavendish Square. The Archbishop gave a practical proof of his interest in the new project by going to inspect the house and expressing his entire approval of it. He particularly wished the first Convent of the Helpers to be in London, wherever they might eventually settle.

On February 6, Mère du Sacre Cœur and Mère St. Augustin arrived in London and were escorted by Lady Lothian and the Countess Digby to the house in Queen Anne Street. In this part of London, perhaps

more than in any other, crushed up between high, imposing mansions and fashionable shops, were narrow alleys of squalid over-crowded dwellings. The Mother General's quick eye must have noticed these signs of poverty, and inwardly rejoiced at the many opportunities her daughters would have of satisfying their zeal for souls.

The small, unpretentious house in Queen Anne Street had been inhabited by the celebrated landscape-painter, Turner, whose well-lighted studio could very easily be converted into a chapel, and, if necessary, be enlarged by the addition of two adjoining rooms. Two spacious rooms on the ground floor would be convenient for guild meetings, etc., and another still larger would accommodate the poor children.

The house had been empty for some years, and was much in need of repair. The artist Turner was not its sole claim to notoriety, for a murder had been committed within its walls, and the ghost of the victim was said to wander round and frighten away any would-be purchasers. The neighbours, therefore, admired the courage of the French ladies.

Having thoroughly inspected the premises, Mère du Sacré Cœur proceeded to Westminster and was warmly welcomed by Archbishop Manning, who promised to speak of her Society at the approaching meeting of Bishops. His Grace had a great devotion to the Holy Souls, and spoke of his wish to restore to them some of the Masses suppressed at the "Reformation." Before taking leave of his visitors, he appointed a Chaplain for the new Community and gave permission

Holy Rood House from the Garden

for reservation of the Blessed Sacrament as soon as the house was in a fit condition.

Mère du Sacré Cœur returned to Paris, having promised to found a Community in London as soon as possible. Lady Lothian and Countess Digby undertook the complicated business transactions connected with the purchase of the house, and collected some suitable furniture. The remaining nine years' lease of the house was put up for sale on April 2nd, and bought by Countess Digby for the moderate sum of £960.

The good news was immediately telegraphed to the Mother General, who rejoiced in this unmistakable token of the Divine Will, emphasized still more by the fact that a few days later the owner of the house was offered double the sum for the lease.

The necessary repairs and alterations were begun, but it was not until April 27 that Mère de la Miséricorde, Mère St. Mechtilde, and Mère St. Augustin arrived in London. They were hospitably received by the Daughters of Mary, near Farm Street, before taking up their abode in a corner of their new home, which was still over-run by workmen, on the morning of the 28th.

The new-comers could not complain of any lack of hospitality, for as soon as they had taken possession of their new convent, the Countess Digby gave them a standing invitation to lunch, and offered to come and talk English to them during the Community recreation. However, religious order must take precedence even of English lessons, and the kind offer was tactfully refused.

For the first few weeks, regular Community life was utterly impossible. The house was still invaded by workmen, and the noise of the hammering and the smell of paint made up for any self-imposed penances. However, one of the painters hurt his foot and gave the Mothers an opportunity of exercising a corporal work of mercy, much to the edification of the poor man, who would never forget the French nun kneeling at his feet to dress the wound.

The workmen were not out of the house till September 22. The chapel was then prepared for the First Mass, which was to give them the joy of the Divine Master as their abiding Guest. The Sacred Heart nuns at Roehampton kindly gave an altar and tabernacle, above which hung a picture of the Souls in Purgatory. Our Lady and St. Joseph, on ivy-draped pedestals, stood on each either of the altar. "What a pity we have no real flowers," said one of the Mothers as she arranged some artificial lilies on the altar. Surely the beloved Mother Foundress must have been watching over this the first foundation since her death, for towards evening, a large basket of fresh flowers was brought from Lady Georgiana Fullerton.

When Reverend Mère du Sacré Cœur arrived, she was delighted with the little Chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Providence, with a statue of the Sacred Heart in the sanctuary, thus linking up the present with the past. Had not the two first Mothers chosen their significant names that they might be, as it were, living emblems of that love and confidence on which their Society is founded ?

5 Drummond Place, Edinburgh

Chapel, Edinburgh

Early in the morning of the 27th the nuns were surprised and delighted by a visit from the workmen wishing to see the chapel where they had worked for so many weeks. Precisely at eight o'clock the Rev. J. Guiron arrived, and the first Mass was offered for the Souls of the Faithful Departed. Countess Digby, who had given the sacred vessels and vestments, was present as well as Lady Georgiana Fullerton. The nuns sang the *Languentibus* and *Pie Jesu*. A letter to the Mother House in Paris describes the joy of the Community : " 10 a.m. At last Our Lord is amongst us. The fatigue of the last few days is forgotten, and many a loving visit has already been paid to the Good Master. 3.30. After dinner we all went up to the Chapel to sing the *Magnificat*. To-morrow we shall begin to say the office in common, and keep the Rule punctually, according to the clock, which was only put up yesterday evening."

At the same time the Mother General wrote : " Our Lord is showering blessings on our work here. The climate, and various circumstances, give our Mothers a liberal allowance of crosses, and mortifications, which they bear joyfully."

Mère du Sacré Cœur returned to Paris on Tuesday, leaving her daughters full of courage and confidence to face the trials inevitable to a new foundation in a foreign and very Protestant country, amidst strange faces, strange customs, and an unintelligible language. Had it not been for their profound trust in Providence, and for their numerous friends and benefactors, their hearts might well have quailed before the prospect.

But they took each day as it came, according to the tradition of their Society, remembering their beloved Mother Foundress's oft-quoted text : " Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

As November drew near, the Helpers decided to forgo the customary Novena for the Dead, until the new Foundation was more settled. However, their English friends saw no reason why they should be deprived of this great privilege. Would the Mother Superior allow them to consult the Archbishop and accept his decision as a clear token of the Divine Will ? His Grace decided the matter by promising to come himself to open and close the Novena, and to provide preachers for each day from all over London so that the work might become more widely known.

At 8.30 on Sunday, November 2, the Archbishop was received at the Convent with the *Benedictus* and proceeded to open the Novena by saying Mass for the Holy Souls, assisted by Father Guiron. In addition to the Community, twenty-eight persons were present, amongst these Lady Georgiana Fullerton and Lady Herbert of Lea, who afterwards withdrew to one of the parlours with His Grace, where an excellent breakfast had been provided by Mr. and Mrs. Garcia. The Archbishop then spent half-an-hour talking to the Community in the kindest manner, thanking them for coming to his diocese, complimenting them on the simplicity and poverty of the humble beginnings, and asking each one the inevitable question as to how she liked the climate. There could have been but one truthful answer to that question, for the

The Chapel, Glasgow

Our Lady of Peace, Glasgow

rain came down in torrents. It did not, however, damp the ardour of the 163 visitors who crowded into the chapel that afternoon to listen to an eloquent discourse by Mgr. Capel, but unfortunately, as the Diarium humbly confesses, the nuns had not mastered the intricacies of our language sufficiently to appreciate the preacher's eloquence. The attendance throughout the nine days was excellent, and when the Archbishop came to close the Novena on the 9th he preached to a congregation of over 200.

This Novena undoubtedly gave a great impetus to the Helpers' work. Gifts and alms flowed in, and very soon it was possible to paint the Sanctuary, and replace the temporary altar by a new one made of oak, with gilt panels given by Lady Lothian and first used for the Midnight Mass at Christmas. A few days later some richly ornamented statues of Our Lady and St. Joseph arrived from Munich, and Stations of the Cross from Paris, all gifts of Mr. Garcia.

Charitable work was now in full swing. The Monday Benedictions became quite an institution and were well attended by ladies and gentlemen alike. The visiting of the sick also began at the request of Father Coleridge, S.J., with visits to the hospitals. On Monday afternoons, twenty-five ladies, of the best London Society, used to meet in one of the parlours to sew for their poorer brethren, while one of their number read aloud some pious book. Sometimes they were on their way to some big social function, when their elegant dresses had to be protected, "they accordingly put on large white aprons with charming

simplicity, lest the threads should cling to the flounces," says the Diarium. " I love Monday, and look forward to it impatiently, it is a moment of repose to my soul," exclaimed one, echoing the opinion of all the others, who were glad to escape from the endless round of social duties into this haven of peace.

In these early days, the visitors at the Convent seem to have been representative of the two extremes of society, duchesses and charwomen. Many a poor, squalid home was brightened, and many a sick bed made more endurable by these zealous religious, in spite of differences of creed and nationality, for the language of Christian charity makes hearts akin.

The motherly hearts of the nuns were most of all susceptible to the needs of the poor little half-starved children who swarmed in the narrow alleys in this neighbourhood. Sometimes the nuns would stop and talk to them in the streets, and an invitation to the Convent generally met with a hearty response, and gradually the numbers increased as these little waifs brought others equally miserable. Some of their garments were in such an advanced stage of disintegration that the nuns kept a stock of black pinafores to hide their tattered clothing. And so it happened that without any deliberate planning on the part of the nuns, the children, boys and girls, congregated at the convent to learn their catechism and take a little innocent amusement.

As time went on, and the novelty wore off, these little cockney waifs and strays, in spite of their devotion to Sister St. Luke, who was in charge, relapsed into

St. Mary's, Portsmouth

Jersey, C.I.

their native manners and the large guild-room became a pandemonium. Threats and punishments had little effect, and at last Sister St. Luke was recalled to Paris. Whereupon a certain Barbara Annie was deputed to write to the Mother General, protesting against these drastic measures.

> "Dear Reverend Mother, we now write to you begging of you to have the kindness to send Sister St. Luke back again because we would be better, and we are greatly astonished at you making us make such a big sacrifice from us poor little children; we have been praying St. Joseph to change your mind and send Sister St. Luke back again to your little children.
>
> "Barbara Annie."

The Mother General relented and the popular Sister St. Luke returned to London.

In spite of occasional outbursts, these poor children were a great consolation to the nuns, and many baptisms and communions were recorded. The privileged ones were taught to serve Mass and sing in the choir, and occasionally these young converts became very zealous apostles in their own neighbourhood. One day as she was on her way to visit the sick, one of the Mothers met their altar boy, aged eleven, piloting a small girl of seven through the streets in the direction of the Convent. The boy was bursting with importance as he drew the Mother's attention to his young companion. "Is she your sister?"

" Oh, no, I ain't got a sister, this is Sarah, she lives next door to us, her mother is at work so I am taking her for a walk." " Is she a Catholic ? " asked the nun. " No, not even baptized." The Mother looked lovingly at the small waif while her guardian continued confidingly : " I am trying to convert her, and I hope it won't be long." Sarah, no doubt delighted at being the centre of interest, gazed approvingly at her spiritual director. " I have had her sent to a Catholic school, but . . . " he continued with some show of embarrassment, " her mother wants to take her away because the children there are so dirty. Can't you have her in your school ? " he asked eagerly. " I am going to speak to her mother about it."

The nun looked from the zealous apostle to the diminutive proselyte, and then shook her head. " We have no school . . . but bring her on Sunday to Benediction. And you, Sarah, ask your mother to let you be baptized." The following Sunday the two children appeared. " I have spoken to mother," said Sarah, " and she said ' all right '."

Sarah was accordingly taken to a priest, who consented to administer the Sacrament of Baptism next Sunday if Sarah could say the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Creed. " I know them already," interrupted the child eagerly ; ——" and Acts of Faith, Hope, Charity and Contrition," continued the Father. " I will see to that," said Sarah's small guardian with all the zeal of a recent convert.

The following Saturday, the same Mother was summoned to the parlour where she found the two children.

" Mother, I have taught her the Acts, and I want her to say them to you."

And then, with a commanding gesture to Sarah, he proceeded to walk up and down the room, while the little girl repeated her lesson.

So the Sacrament was duly administered the following day. A godmother had to be found, but her importance was completely eclipsed by the youthful godfather whose consequential air made up for his diminutive stature.

Sarah's mother, who watched the ceremony, was so impressed that she asked there and then to be instructed in the Faith. She came that same evening to Benediction, and to the tea-party where the newly made Christian and her godfather were the centre of attraction.

The Helpers had indeed chosen a propitious time for their mission to England. The old prejudices against Catholics were gradually breaking down, and many notable conversions amongst the aristocracy and the English clergy had given a new impetus to the Catholic cause. Many earnest inquirers would call at Queen Anne Street, and question the nuns about this Faith which was such a living force in them. Mourners, too, whose hearts were aching with the loss of some beloved one, found untold comfort in the thought that they could still benefit the dear departed, who had passed out of reach of their earthly ministration.

Hardly a day passed without lengthy conversations with the Sisters, who wisely refrained from arguments, but simply and clearly defined the dogma of Purgatory

with an absolute conviction that never failed to impress these gropers in the dark.

When Christmas came the nuns had the consolation of seeing their small chapel full of converts, whom they had prepared for the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, and even Matrimony.

Some of the visitors had come from distant parts of London, and could not return home after the Midnight Mass. The Mothers had a simple method of solving such difficulties, they gave up their own poor cells, and spent the night in the Chapel, or on the benches in the Guild-room.

As time went on, every charitable work undertaken by the Helpers grew and developed. The Monday Meetings increased wonderfully ; the meetings for girls on Sundays and the Guilds for children were flourishing ; innumerable poor patients were nursed in their own homes, and many a death bed hallowed by the tender charity of these true Helpers.

Constant intercourse was maintained with the Mother House in Paris, entailing many journeys across the Channel, as various Mothers came and went. The Mother General's annual visitations were always joyfully anticipated, and generally took place in the autumn.

In 1875, however, she arrived in July—perhaps some premonition of coming illness induced her to undertake the journey before the usual time. Her health, never very robust, had been seriously affected by the climate and by her ceaseless activities, which

had worn her out long before her time. That autumn she began to fail visibly, although she relinquished few of her arduous duties. Every month found her a little weaker, and there was no question of her crossing the English Channel the following year. An operation on St. Gertrude's day, 1876, afforded a slight relief, but was soon followed by alarming symptoms which precluded all hope of recovery. Her intense physical sufferings never caused her to lose interest in her beloved religious family, and when her end was drawing very near, she rejoiced in hearing that the Novitiate had been established in London. On New Year's Day, 1877, a telegram was despatched to Queen Anne Street summoning Mère de la Miséricorde to the death bed of the Reverend Mother General.

The funeral took place on the Feast of the Epiphany, so appropriate for one who had indeed given her gold, the love of her heart, her frankincense, the complete holocaust of herself and all self-interests, her myrrh, the bitter sufferings that ended her life.

The little Convent in Queen Anne Street wore a festive appearance on the day of the Reverend Mother General's funeral, for the children must not be disappointed of their Christmas tea-party. With utter self-forgetfulness the Mothers gave themselves up to entertaining their guests. It was not till the door had closed on the last of these small merry-makers that the nuns could unburden some of their sorrow in the stillness of the chapel. Not only had they lost their beloved Mère du Sacré Cœur, but they must have

known in their hearts that Mère de la Miséricorde would undoubtedly be elected in her place and would not return to direct the work at Queen Anne Street. Their fears were confirmed a week later, when Mère de la Miséricorde was elected Mother General, and Mère St. Madeleine de Pazzi came to take her place as Superior of the London house. This year was marked also by a second great loss, Lady Lothian died in Rome on May 14, thus depriving the Community of one of their first most devoted and faithful benefactors.

The next two years passed by uneventfully in a ceaseless round of apostolic labours, but towards the close of 1879 the Mother Superior was sent from London to Cannes, and on November 18, Mère St. Paul arrived to take up the reins of government.

Mère St. Paul, the zealous young missionary who, twelve years before, had accompanied Mère du Sacré Cœur to China, had lost none of her interest in the Far East, and one of her first visits was to the Chinese Embassy to deliver certain gifts which she had recently brought from Shanghai. A few weeks later the whole of Queen Anne Street was astir with excitement, every window was filled with eager sight-seers ; the doorsteps and pavements were crowded. A grand carriage had drawn up in front of the Convent, and the Chinese ambassador with his wife and two children alighted in all the splendour of Eastern draperies, and disappeared through the humble front door of the Convent. His Excellency's small daughter was so delighted with her visit that she

came again a few days later to the children's Christmas tea-party.

The winter of 1879-80 brought many trials to the struggling Community. Benefactors seemed to have lost their first fervour and had to be reminded of the subscriptions which had formerly poured in so generously. Moreover, the cold was intense, food and fuel by no means plentiful, and the temperature of some of the bedrooms was so arctic that sleep was impossible. But there was always food for the constant stream of cold and starving poor who knew they would never be turned away empty-handed from this hospitable door.

In the course of the year many new friends came to help on the good work, and the Portiuncula brought a crowd of distinguished visitors.

The Community had now been established in Queen Anne Street for over seven years, and the lease of the house was soon to expire. In August, 1881, Countess Digby came to discuss with the Superior the advisability of asking for a renewal of the lease. A few weeks later, it was rumoured that the Duke of Portland intended to demolish several old houses in the street, and re-build on a much later scale, in the hopes of obtaining higher rents. In the meantime, kind friends of the Society discovered several likely houses for sale at prices varying from £2,000 to £15,000.

Price was no object to these religious, for, like their venerated Foundress, they had their treasure house in Heaven. On October 26 there was not one

shilling in the house. However, Divine Providence repaid their complete trust by sending £1 that same evening through an honorary member. A few days later, they were in the same penniless state, but again, the morning post brought two offerings of £1 each, so the Sister was able to go out and do her marketing as usual.

The people who flocked to the November Novena that year probably little guessed that these religious, with their happy, serene faces, were suffering the pangs of poverty ; indeed, it seemed very uncertain whether they would even have a roof over their heads, for they soon heard that No. 23 and the two adjoining houses were definitely condemned. " Our Lady of Providence, pray for us," was all the comment they made. Towards the end of the year a house was found close to Regent's Park which seemed more suitable than any that had hitherto been suggested, and when the Countess Digby and her mother promised subscriptions, it really seemed that Divine Providence were directing operations. No important step was ever taken without consulting the highest ecclesiastical authority, and on January 18, 1881, the Mother Superior went to the Archbishop's house. The weather was most inclement, even the bus horses could make no head-way in the snow and sleet that blocked the streets. The two nuns made their way on foot through the snow across Oxford Street to Westminster, where the warmth of their reception soon counteracted the bitter cold of this wintry day. The Cardinal fully approved of the purchase of Park

House and tactfully forebore to question the Superior too closely as to the state of her finances. He knew the history of the Society and the spiritual resources of the "spoilt child's" daughters. The important point of the future chaplain was settled by His Eminence's saying: "I give you to Father Bown," the very one for whom the whole Community had been praying.

The following week, the Mother Superior went with Mr. Pollen to inspect Park House more thoroughly, and decide whether the necessary alterations were practicable. Mr. Pollen's experienced eye and sound judgment settled this question satisfactorily, and the Community at once began to storm heaven with a fervent Novena for the new house, although their confessor, Father Coleridge, rather damped their ardour by remarking: "It would be much better to go to Haverstock Hill or Bayswater, or Westminster or nearer the Jesuit Church, where there would be more good to be done." The Novena brought no immediate answer, but St. Joseph's month was approaching, and the Community knew that they might count on his aid. On March 17, the Mother General arrived, and the following day a letter came from Countess Digby promising £100 towards the new house, and undertaking to interest her friends in the project.

As soon as Reverend Mother General had seen and approved of Park House, the Community began in earnest to collect the necessary funds. Hundreds of printed circulars, appealing for subscriptions, were

distributed by the Marchioness of Londonderry, Countess Ravensworth, Lady Denbigh, Lady Charlotte Dundas, Countess Digby, and many other kind friends of the Society.

June 29 was the Mother Superior's Feast day. A kind letter from Mother General enclosing £10, together with the signed contracts for the new house, completed their joy, and when the Mothers found two shillings for the poor under each dinner napkin, they felt it was indeed a memorable occasion.

Acting on a certain well-known general's advice to his soldiers : " Trust in God—but keep your powder dry," these valiant Helpers redoubled their prayers, and incited each other to a more complete confidence in God's protecting hand, but at the same time they made every conceivable effort to collect the large sum needed for the purchase of this new house. Circular letters, as well as private circulars, were distributed, and one of the Mothers with deft fingers cut out a drawing of Park House with the inscription " God loveth the cheerful giver." The appeal met with a generous response. The Countess Digby's £100 was followed by like sums from Lord Rothschild and Madame de las Casas, while the Duchess of Buccleugh, the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk and Lord Ripon all gave generously. An unexpected £200 from the Superior of the Sisters of Providence, Loughborough, in memory of her deceased sister and nephew, called forth heartfelt gratitude, and a diploma of Benefactress was sent to the donor.

Meanwhile the lawyers continued to discuss the

terms of agreement ; it was not until the Feast of St. Anne, July 26, that the title-deeds were ready for signing.

The last Christmas at Queen Anne Street was celebrated by a farewell party, when fifty-four children enjoyed a substantial meal of roast beef and plum pudding, followed by a desert of oranges and crackers, provided by Mr. and Lady Georgiana Fullerton

Early in February, 1882, the Helpers of the Holy Souls took possession of Park House, and the necessary repairs were immediately begun. The chapel was, of course, the first consideration, and hopes were raised of having the first Mass on St. Joseph's day. The Mother General arrived at Queen Anne Street on February 17, and interviewed Mr. Pugin, who had undertaken to build the new Chapel, and was greatly disappointed when told that he could not begin at once. On March 6 the Associates met for the last time at Queen Anne Street, when Father Barry preached an eloquent sermon, thanking the Helpers of the Holy Souls for all the good they had done in the parish, and urging the ladies not to allow their zeal to slacken, merely because they would have farther to go for the meetings, for would not every additional step bring them an increase of glory in heaven, and consolation at the hour of death.

On March 10 the last Mass was said at Queen Anne Street, while Mrs. Dunn's carriage waited to receive the priest who was bearing the Blessed Sacrament to Spanish Place.

On St. Joseph's day the first Mass was said in the

new Convent, and many congratulations were offered to the Community by the Countess Ravensworth and several other ladies who were present. When the Associates came on Monday for their weekly meeting they were full of admiration for the new house. One of the Associates, Miss Janet Erskine Stuart, attended the Monday Meetings very regularly ; one day in May she lingered after the others had left and told the Mother Superior, with tears in her eyes, that she would no longer be able to come as Our Lord had called her to the Sacred Heart Order and she was leaving almost immediately for the Novitiate at Roehampton.

In January, 1883, the Mother General came for her annual visitation, and a week later Mother St. Gertrude arrived as Superior of the ever-increasing Community.

During the next few years many kind friends and benefactors joined the great army of the Church suffering, and reaped their reward for all the benefits they had conferred on the grateful nuns. Lady Georgiana Fullerton died in 1885 and five years later Father Bown, too, passed away. In 1892 the Helpers lost a great friend in Cardinal Manning, although his successor, Cardinal Vaughan, showed the kindest interest in the Community.

The apostolic labours of the nuns brought so many people to the house that very soon the Chapel was too small to accommodate them, but it was not until 1897 that the hope of a new Chapel began to materialize, and Mr. Romaine Walker came to discuss the project and to take measurements. Soon after, Lord Ralph Kerr expressed his approval and promised £50. Many

others followed his example, and although the Mother General was at first averse to beginning the work until the full amount had been collected, she yielded to the earnest entreaties of the Helpers' friends, and in June she sent permission to begin the building. The work went on apace under the personal supervision of the architect, Mr. Romaine Walker, whose kind influence also obtained from a friend of his the sum necessary to gild the ceiling of the sanctuary, whilst Mr. Norman Russ put in the electric light "as a little offering to Almighty God." The new Chapel was ready on All Souls' Day, and in the afternoon a stream of worshippers arrived for the opening of the Novena.

The Duchess of Newcastle, Lady Denbigh, Lady Beaumont, and the Hon. Mrs. Fraser were amongst those who listened to Mgr. Patterson's eloquent sermon, though doubtless they were disappointed that illness prevented the Cardinal from keeping his promise of officiating at Benediction.

Not long after this the foundations of the house were threatened by the construction of a railway tunnel, and when cracks began to appear in the walls of the Chapel the nuns were advised to seek redress. The case was taken before the Lords, and it was ordained that the Company should not advance within twenty feet of the Convent and for seven years should be responsible for any damage caused by vibration.

Seven years later entirely new buildings had to be put up, and workmen were busily engaged digging the foundations which had to be extraordinarily deep to obviate any further danger from vibration. As the

building operations were carried on close to a very crowded thoroughfare, they naturally attracted considerable attention from the passers-by, whose curiosity was all the more aroused by the fact that this building was actually a Convent.

The work began in 1908, was completed two years later, when the new Convent, " Holy Rood House," was ready for occupation. The noble building designed by the well-known architects, Messrs. Romaine Walker and Jenkins, is built in the Italian style with large overhanging eaves and flat-pitched roofs, covered with red Roman tiles, finished with white rough-cast and flatstone dressings, and forms an imposing block of buildings where four main roads meet. The interior is admirably suited for its purpose, with its spacious rooms for guilds and meetings and all the various charitable works on which these Helpers expend their untiring zeal.

The Chapel, of the Roman Basilica type, is a gem of beauty. It seats 250, but by an ingenious arrangement can be enlarged in a moment by the removal of folding screens, thus throwing in the corridor and large reception room at the back, and thereby doubling the accommodation. The new Chapel was opened on April 12, 1910, by the Archbishop of Westminster in the presence of numerous priests and a large congregation of lay folk, filling every available corner. The Archbishop preached an appropriate sermon, in which he said that the doctrine and practice of prayer for the Faithful Departed were enshrined in an especial manner in that Chapel and Institute devoted to the service

Chapel, New York

of the suffering souls. He congratulated the sisters on having at last obtained a Convent and Chapel worthy of their noble work of hallowed supplication for those who had passed away.

Two years later, the debt having been paid off, arrangements were made for the Solemn Consecration of the chapel which took place on Wednesday, June 12, 1913. His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster kindly accepted to perform the function of consecrating the chapel itself together with the high altar, whilst their Lordships, the Right Rev. John Keily, Bishop of Plymouth, and the Right Rev. Joseph Butt, Bishop of Cambysopolis, performed the same ceremony at the side altars of Our Lady and St. Joseph. The long and beautiful function was carried through with that precision and ease which showed the great care that had been taken with the details of its preparation. This was followed by the usual lunch.

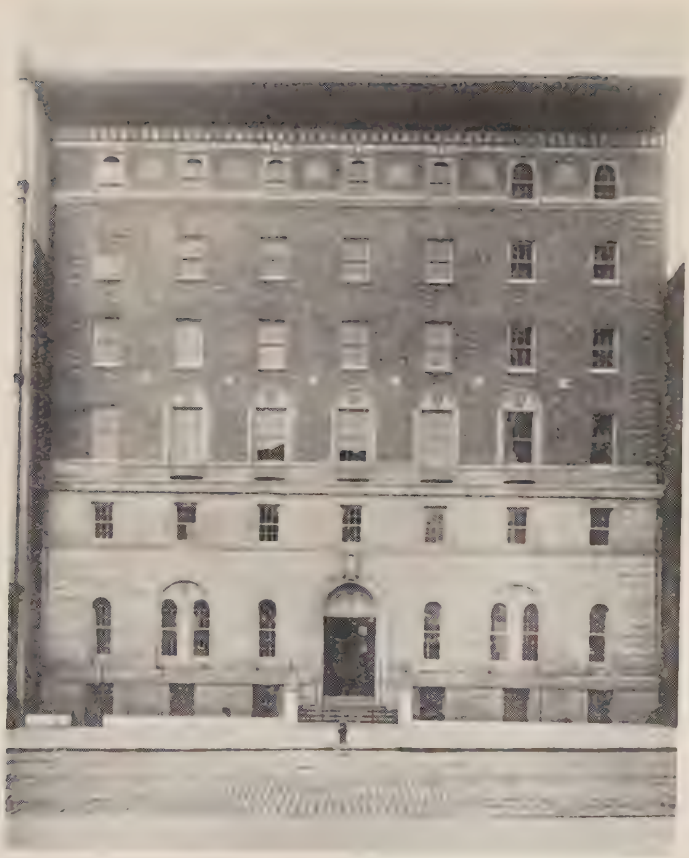
Although the supernatural field of action of this Institute lies beyond the tomb, the life work of the religious is not a crusade of prayer alone. Pray, Suffer, Labour, is their motto. While the first two elements remain hidden within the cloister, London has now for many years been a daily witness of the activity of the last word " Labour " in social work among the poor and working classes. In the homes of the poor, the hospitals, and the Convent guild-rooms, the Helpers gather in a treasure of merit, not for their own eternal happiness alone, but above all to purchase eternal happiness for the waiting souls in Purgatory, moreover, by the rule of the Order, all their labour in

whatever sphere is given gratuitously, the gain of each laborious day is for the souls to whom it may open Heaven and thus increase the accidental glory of God. Holy Rood House is in truth a focus of devotion to the departed ; of consolation to those who mourn them ; and of hope to the living, who know they will be remembered there, when the world has forgotten them. The beautiful Chapel becomes in November a living embodiment of the Communion of Saints.

In 1923 the Helpers of the Holy Souls celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the London Foundation, and, as a small token of esteem and gratitude, their many friends had the decoration of the chapel and altar completed, the apse lined with marble adorned with mosaic in gold.

" The Holy Souls require a perpetual reparation which will radiate from your Convent over the whole of England," wrote the Bishop of Southwark in 1863 ; after fifty years from the convent had radiated three new houses in England, two in Scotland and one in Jersey.

" Out of the depths " had England's forgotten dead cried for mercy, and these Helpers had come " relying on His word and hoping in the Lord," bearing His divine message of mercy and plentiful redemption. For over fifty years their *Requiem æternam* has been rising up like incense to the Eternal Throne, and who can number the countless souls that have been admitted to eternal rest and perpetual light. And if indeed there is joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance can we not truthfully assert that Heaven and



New York, U.S.A.

Purgatory shared in the joy of that Jubilee in 1923? No one can enter the precincts of Holy Rood House without being aware of the atmosphere of holy joy that pervades every corner, a joy which some might consider as incompatible with the thought of death, but which is surely the joy of the angels overflowing to earth. Who, indeed, will venture to question that the liberated souls repay some of the joy they feel by transmitting it to these their Helpers who pray, suffer and labour so generously for their relief and deliverance.

America[1]

It seemed natural that once established in England, the Helpers of the Holy Souls should extend their apostolate to other English-speaking lands. It was not, however, till some sixteen years later that America opened to them its harvest fields. The preparing of the ground for the seed was due to the saintly Jesuit novice-master, Père de Perron. He imparted to his novices an ardent devotion to the souls in Purgatory, and with it a deep admiration for the Order consecrated to their succour.

Several of his novices, when visiting Europe later on as active members of the Society of Jesus, spent some time in London, and there became acquainted with the Helpers and were able to appreciate their work. Among these were Father Spillane, and Father Prendergast in Jersey, and more notably, Father Pardow, who until his death was a zealous promoter of the Order. On their return to New York, they at once

[1] Contributed by one of our American Houses.

set about procuring friends for the Helpers of the Holy Souls. In a short time numbers of pious ladies were enthusiastically interested and devoted their energies to making the Order known and thus bring about a foundation in America. In 1887, Father Prendergast wrote to the Mother General of the Society :

" St. Francis Xavier's, New York,
December 4, 1887.

" Very Reverend Mother,—A pious lady has offered the sum of 10,000 dollars for a foundation of the Holy Souls in New York. Will you come ? The Ecclesiastical Authorities are favourable to the project. The field is vast ; with New York all America lies before you. Please let me know what you think of this offer and on what conditions you can accept it. May the Holy Souls interest themselves in an undertaking which is so completely to their benefit and for the glory of God."

In spite of this and similar urgent appeals the proposal remained without result and the 10,000 dollars went to the establishment of another convent. Three years later the question was again urged, and at length the Mother General sent one of the assistants with a companion to examine the situation. Hospitality was most cordially given in the house of one of the most active promoters, the first American benefactress of the Society. The Archbishop of New York welcomed the visitors most graciously, gave full approbation, and promised a memento in his Mass

every day till the project reached execution. In the month of May following, a little band of seven Helpers arrived in New York. A house suitable for the beginnings had been found and affectionately prepared by the same generous benefactress. On the very next day one of the newspapers triumphantly announced that an event long hoped for had at length taken place ; described the work of the nuns, and asked kind friends to join in facilitating their establishment in the city. By November all was on a sufficient footing to permit the celebration for the Novena for the Holy Souls. It was opened by the Archbishop. The Jesuit Fathers devotedly offered their services for the sermons of the nine days, and the little chapel was filled to overflowing. Father Spillane, in the first sermon, related the pleasure he had experienced on assisting at the first Mass in the chapel of the Helpers in London, and how zealously they were there working for the interests of the Church. Notwithstanding this cordial reception the nuns soon found that their pathway was not to be always smooth ; there were days when bread failed and when the little purse was empty. A striking incident occurred at this time, attributed to the sanctity of the Superior. Only a few handfuls of coal remained in the cellar, and there was no money to procure more. " Go each morning to the cellar as usual," she said to the Sister—and every morning sufficient was found for the day. After several days, a little donation was sent, and then coal was ordered. " We must no longer tempt Divine Providence," was the humble injunction of the Superior.

The Convent was not more than a few weeks established in New York when the various branches of good works began to flourish. The labours of the nuns among the sick poor gained them an easy entrance into the hearts of the people, and in almost all the poor homes visited they found souls hungering for religious instruction. A remark of a little girl of four may be taken as voicing the opinion of many. After seriously watching two Helpers nursing her sick mother, she drily exclaimed : " You are God's ladies." Instruction of converts, catechism classes, and the other spiritual and corporal works of mercy to which the Helpers devote themselves grew rapidly, including special settlement work for the Italian, German, and Spanish population, so numerous in the great American capital.

The work among the coloured was from the first the ambition of the nuns. No small courage was needed for the pioneer visits in the district known as Minetta Lane, at that period the exclusive haunt of the coloured. The Helpers soon counted many friends among these ; one of their first consolations was the first communion of a poor cripple girl, on which occasion the lowly room was transformed into a little chapel, the poor negress charmed to see herself attired in spotless white. Another fruitful apostolate was the visiting of the hospitals. The Jesuit Fathers who attended the immense hospital of Blackwell Island solicited the aid of the Helpers for the thousand Catholic patients there, most of whom were totally ignorant of even the elementary truths of religion. Soon after the great state establishment,

House and Chapel, St. Louis, U.S.A

Bellevue Hospital and the German and Italian Hospitals were added. Last, but not least, came the Home of Coloured Incurables. Here, at first, admission was refused, as the Protestant influence was dominant, but in a short time, so completely had the authorities been won over, Mass was permitted in the hospital.

To meet the needs of these ever-increasing activities the five houses adjoining the Convent in East 85th Street were successively acquired, and in 1916 rebuilt into the fine Convent of to-day, to which a handsome chapel has recently been added.

It is interesting to note that one of the first marvellous cures attributed to the Foundress took place in the early years of the New York Foundation. A little girl whose family was visited by the Helpers was attacked with diphtheria and declared beyond hope of recovery. Seeing the anguish of the parents, the nuns suggested a Novena to the American Missionary Martyr, Father Jogues, S.J., then greatly venerated, or to Mère Marie de la Providence. "Let it be to your Foundress," requested the mother of the child; "she must have been very holy since she instituted an order in which there is so much charity." The Novena was begun with fervour; next morning the fever had abated, and, to the astonishment of the doctor, the patient was cured.

In 1898 an American edition of Father Garside's pamphlet on the Helpers of the Holy Souls, published in London, was produced in New York and contributed much to make the Order known. Since then,

foundations have been made in St. Louis, San Francisco, Chicago, established on similar lines to that of New York, and a Novitiate at Chappaqua on the Hudson, at a short distance from New York, where Divine Providence has placed at their disposal an extensive property forming an ideal abode for recollection and prayer.

English Novitiate House, Marnhull, Dorset

American Novitiate House, "Chappaqua," New York

Appendix II

THOUGHTS OF MÈRE MARIE DE LA PROVIDENCE

IF we enter on the royal way of the Cross, each trial or sorrow will be a station before which we shall kneel to adore the hand of Providence, and the last station on that road will be the gate of Heaven.

Who but Jesus can satisfy these hungry hearts of ours, starving as they are for happiness !

If we thirst after God, we must thirst for everything that draws us closer to Him.

Let us fight the battles of the Lord with that generosity which St. Ignatius speaks of, when he tells us to go forward at any cost, in spite of all obstacles, never looking back, each day learning a new lesson of sacrifice, until the desire of sacrifice becomes a burning thirst.

If we want to rouse ourselves to courage, we must look at that little door of the Tabernacle, out of which Jesus comes so lovingly to our hearts.

We say every day in our Office of the Dead : " Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not . . ." then I said: " Behold I come." Yes, let us repeat : " Behold I come . . . to work all my life, by prayer, by suffering and by labour for the deliverance of the Souls in Purgatory."

The more we give ourselves to Jesus, the more He gives Himself to us ; and, for the soul to whom He gives Himself, Calvary becomes Thabor.

Let us make no other projects than to do God's will.

Fear nothing, except not to do God's will perfectly.

It seems to you that you do nothing, feel nothing, know nothing ! . . . Never mind ; the good God will contrive to weave a crown for you out of all the nothings you have offered up for His love.

The Cross is the foundation of every vocation.

They who cannot suffer cannot love.

It is only in sacrifice that a true religious can find joy.

Let us put on Jesus Christ, and, thus clothed, descend continually into Purgatory to give Him to those poor souls, by our deeds, our suffering, and our prayer.

Let us always remember that our vocation is an apostolate. We are bound to bring souls to God, whether we find them on earth or seek them in Purgatory.

Personal sanctification is the first step towards apostleship.

The Souls in Purgatory suffer without a moment's interruption. Their Helpers must never cease a moment to assist them.

O Will of God, be thou ever blessed !

Submission to the Will of God is the truest union with Him.

Our union with Jesus is ratified on the Cross.

O Will of God, Will of God ! . . . these words give strength to bear everything.

When iron is thrown into the fire, it acquires all the properties of the fire ; if we throw our hearts into the Heart of Jesus, they will be filled with humility, charity, and zeal.

O blessed detachment, lift up my heart into the Heart of my Divine Master !

It is not for my own enjoyment that I desire Heaven, but that I may for ever witness . . . that I may for ever revel in . . . the Glory of God, without reverting to myself. If Almighty God should leave me in a corner of His kingdom, I should be content, provided that from that corner I might see the glory given to God by His elect.

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